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DNA double-strand breaks are induced by endogenous free radicals and environmental agents such as ionizing radiation. The repair of DNA double-strand breaks is important for preventing possible chromosomal fragmentation, translocations, and deletions induced by these breaks. The accurate repair of DNA double-strand breaks is mediated by a group of genes called the *RAD52* epistasis group and proceeds via a recombinational mechanism. In mammals, the efficiency of recombinational DNA repair is modulated by the tumor suppressors *BRCA1* and *BRCA2*, providing compelling evidence that this DNA repair pathway functions to suppress cancer formation. Importantly, recombinational DNA repair is also required for the removal of interstrand DNA crosslinks formed by bifunctional crosslinking agents, which are commonly used to treat various malignancies. Our research efforts are directed at establishing biochemical models for examining the functions of the various *RAD52* group components and for delineating the mechanism of recombinational DNA repair. Recent studies in our laboratory have established an in vitro system for examining the recombinase activity of human Rad51 and have demonstrated that human Rad51B and Rad51C proteins are associated as a stable complex. Together with our collaborators, *BRCA2* protein has been expressed in insect cells with the use of a recombinant baculovirus. Ongoing studies address the functional and physical interactions among the aforementioned and other recombination factors of the *RAD52* group.

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INTRODUCTION

In eukaryotic organisms, DNA double-strand break (DSB) repair is mediated by genes of the *RAD52* epistasis group via a recombinational mechanism or by a Ku/DNA ligase IV-dependent DNA end-joining pathway (reviewed by Paques and Haber, 1999 and Sung et al, 2000). The importance of the recombinational repair pathway in the maintenance of genomic stability is underscored by the observation that the tumor suppressors BRCA1 and BRCA2 physically interact with and influence the biological activities of key members of the *RAD52* group. Specifically, BRCA1 has been found to associate with the protein complex consisting of the Rad50, Mre11, and NBS1 proteins, all members of the *RAD52* group, and influences the localization of this protein trio to sites of DNA double-strand breaks. In fact, genetic studies have indicated that BRCA1 is needed to ensure normal levels of recombination and DNA repair (Moynahan et al, 1999; reviewed in Dasika et al, 1999). Rad51, the functional and structural homolog of the *E. coli* RecA recombinase, interacts with BRCA2 via a number of BRC repeats and the carboxyl-terminal domain of BRCA2 (Dasika et al, 1999). BRCA2 mutant cells are sensitive to DSB causative agents and show a deficiency in recombination and DSB repair (Dasika et al, 1999; Moynahan et al, 2001). The mechanism of the recombination machinery and the manner in which the functions of this machinery are modulated by BRCA1 and BRCA2 have remained mysterious.

BODY

Basis for avid DNA strand exchange by Rad51

Human Rad51, like its counterparts in lower eukaryotes (Rad51) and in bacteria (RecA), polymerizes on ssDNA to form a right-handed nucleoprotein filament (Bianco et al, 1998; Roca and Cox, 1997), which has the ability to search for a DNA homolog, catalyze the formation of DNA joints with the homolog via DNA pairing, and extend the length of the heteroduplex DNA joints by DNA strand exchange. In previously published studies, human Rad51 (hRad51) was found to have the ability to form DNA joints but the maximal potential for making only about one kilo base pairs of heteroduplex DNA (Baumann et al, 1996; Gupta et al, 1997). Furthermore, while yRad51 and RecA require their cognate single-strand DNA binding factors, SSB and yRPA, for optimal recombinase activity, hRPA has been suggested to stimulate the hRad51-mediated homologous pairing and strand exchange reaction only when the hRad51 concentration is sub-optimal (Baumann and West, 1999). We wished to re-examine whether hRad51 has only limited homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange ability as suggested in the published literature, or that other reaction conditions are needed to reveal the full recombinase function in Rad51. Our work, which was published recently (Sigurdsson et al, 2001), has indicated that the inclusion of a relatively high level of a divalent anion enhances DNA joint formation by Rad51 and also greatly improves the efficiency of the DNA strand exchange reaction. These studies have demonstrated for the first time that Rad51 can readily promote DNA strand exchange over at least 5.4 kilo base pairs. Importantly, our studies have also revealed a strict dependence of the Rad51 homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange activity on the single-stranded DNA binding factor RPA (Sigurdsson et al, 2001).

Extensive biochemical studies have revealed the presence of two distinct DNA binding sites in the RecA/Rad51 class of recombinases, with the initiating ssDNA substrate viewed as being situated within the "primary" site, while the incoming duplex molecule as being bound within the "secondary" site. The search for DNA homology in the duplex DNA by the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament occurs by way of reiterative binding and release of the duplex until homology is located. For this random collision mode of DNA homology search to work efficiently, the incoming duplex molecule

must be retained only transiently within the secondary site of the recombinase-ssDNA filament. We have presented evidence to support the notion that salt exerts its remarkable stimulatory effect by weakening the interactions of the duplex molecule with the hRad51-ssDNA filament, thereby enhancing the rate of turnover of the duplex and the efficiency at which the duplex can be sampled for homology. The results from our published study (Sigurdsson et al, 2001) are summarized in the model in Figure 1.

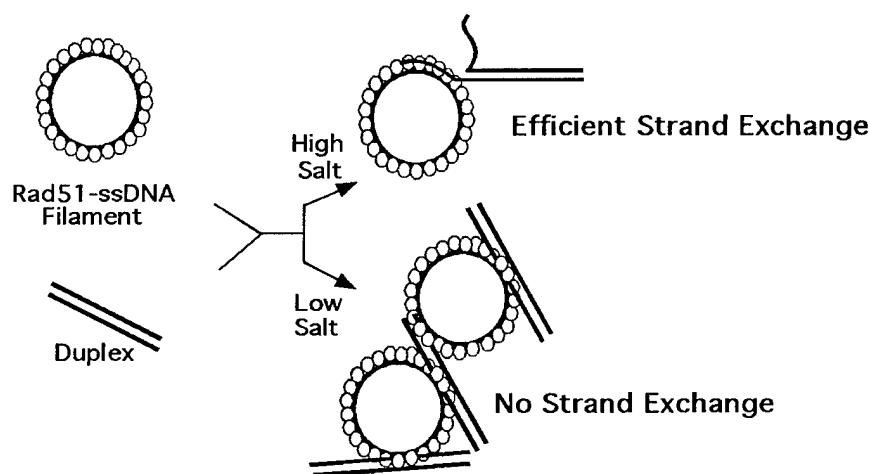


Figure 1. Our working model suggests that duplex molecules stably bound within the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament present a strong impediment to the successful completion of the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction. High reaction efficiency is realized by the inclusion of salt to weaken the interaction of the “secondary” DNA binding site in the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament with the duplex (Sigurdsson et al, 2001).

Rad51B-Rad51C complex

Five Rad51-like proteins, namely, Rad51B, Rad51C, Rad51D, XRCC2, and XRCC3 have been described in vertebrates and are commonly referred to as Rad51 paralogs. As indicated from genetic studies in hamster, mouse, and chicken cells, the five Rad51 paralogs are all indispensable for recombination and DSB repair by recombination. Currently, the biochemical functions of the Rad51 paralogs in recombination and DNA repair are unknown, but yeast two-hybrid and immunoprecipitation studies have suggested that these Rad51 paralogs interact among themselves and with Rad51 (Schild et al, 2000; Takata et al, 2001). We have raised antibodies against portions of Rad51B and Rad51C expressed in and purified from *E. coli*. Affinity purified antibodies were used in immunoblot analyses for the identification of Rad51B and Rad51C in HeLa cell extract. As shown in Figure 2A, Rad51B and Rad51C in the HeLa extract co-eluted from a Q Sepharose column precisely. Importantly, Rad51B and Rad51C in the Q Sepharose column fractions co-immunoprecipitated with each other, indicating that they are associated in a complex (data not shown).

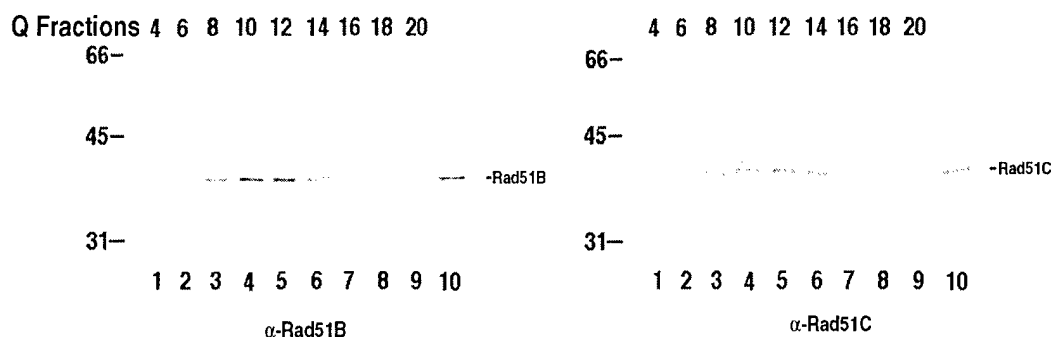


Figure 2. Hela cell extract was chromatographed in a Q Sepharose column and the fractions were probed with either anti-Rad51B or anti-Rad51C antibodies as marked. In lane 10, extract from yeast cells expressing Rad51B (left panel) or Rad51C (right panel) was included as positive control.

The results above have indicated that Rad51B and Rad51C are associated in a complex in HeLa cell extract, but they could not address whether association of these two proteins is due to a direct interaction between them or an intermediary is in fact required for the association to occur. To determine whether Rad51B and Rad51C interact directly, we constructed recombinant baculoviruses that encode a six histidine-tagged form of Rad51B and a non-tagged form of Rad51C. The expression of Rad51B and Rad51C in Sf9 insect cells infected with these baculoviruses was verified by immunoblotting (Figure 3A). Since Rad51B was tagged with a six-histidine sequence in this instance, we could use affinity binding of the six histidine tag to nickel-NTA agarose as criterion for protein-protein interactions. As summarized in Figure 3B, whereas non-tagged Rad51C alone does not have any affinity for the nickel matrix, a significant fraction of it became retained on the affinity matrix in the presence of the histidine-tagged Rad51B. Taken together, we concluded that Rad51B and Rad51C interact directly. The results presented below further indicated that the complex of Rad51B and Rad51C is highly stable and consists of equimolar amounts of the two proteins.

Rad51C expressed in insect cells consists of two very closely spaced species (Figure 3), with the top band having the same gel mobility as Rad51C seen in Hela cell extract (data not shown). We presume that the slower migrating form of the two Rad51C immunoreactive bands is full size Rad51C, whereas the faster migrating form is a proteolytic product.

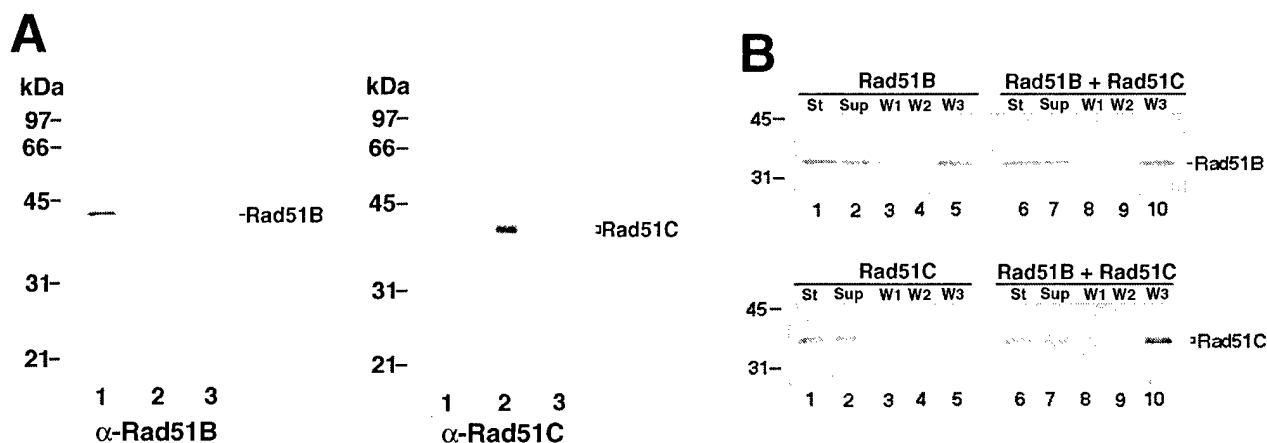


Figure 3. Rad51B and Rad51C form a complex. **A.** Extracts from Sf9 insect cells harboring recombinant baculoviruses that express six histidine-tagged Rad51B (lane 1 in both panels) and non-tagged Rad51C (lane 2 in both panels) were probed with anti-Rad51B (α Rad51B) and anti-Rad51C (α Rad51C) antibodies, as shown. Sf9 cell extract was also run as control in lane 3 of both panels. **B.** Extracts from insect cells expressing six histidine-tagged Rad51B (Rad51B) and non-tagged Rad51C (Rad51C) or the mixture of these extracts (Rad51B + Rad51C) were incubated with nickel-NTA agarose beads, which were washed with 10 mM, 20 mM, and then with 150 mM imidazole. The starting fractions (St), the supernatants containing unbound proteins (Sup), the 10 mM (W1), 20 mM (W2), and 150 mM (W3) imidazole washes were subjected to immunoblotting to determine their content of the Rad51B and Rad51C proteins.

Expression and Purification of the Rad51B/Rad51C complex

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We first attempted to purify Rad51B and Rad51C from insect cells individually, but our efforts have been hampered by the complications that a significant portion (>75%) of these proteins proved to be insoluble and the soluble portion gave really broad peaks during chromatographic fractionation procedures. To determine whether the Rad51B-Rad51C complex might be more amenable to purification than the individual components, we co-introduced the Rad51B and Rad51C recombinant baculoviruses into insect cells. Interestingly, co-expression of Rad51B and Rad51C improved their solubility significantly, even though the overall protein amounts in the infected insect cells remained roughly the same. Importantly, the Rad51B-Rad51C complex eluted from various chromatographic matrices as relatively well defined peaks, thus enabling us to obtain substantial purification of the complex. Through many small scale trials using a variety of chromatographic matrices, a procedure was devised which encompasses fractionation of the clarified extract containing the Rad51B-Rad51C complex in S Sepharose, Q Sepharose, Sephacryl S300, Mono Q, and affinity chromatography on nickel NTA agarose (Figure 4A) to purify this complex to near homogeneity (Figure 4B). Equimolar amounts of Rad51B and Rad51C co-fractionated during the entire purification procedure, indicating a high degree of stability of the complex. Using the aforementioned purification protocol, we could obtain about 100 μ g of Rad51B-Rad51C complex from one liter of insect cell culture co-expressing the two subunits.

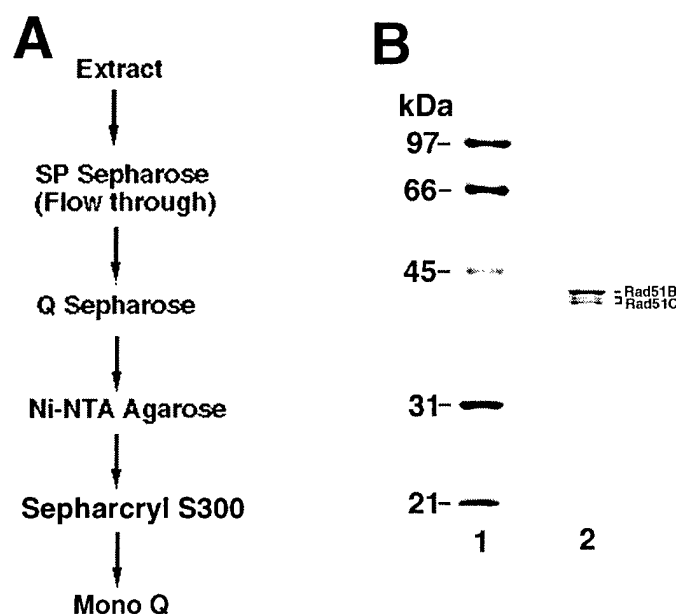


Figure 4. Purification of the Rad51B-Rad51C complex. A. Purification scheme. B. Purified Rad51B-Rad51C complex, 1 μ g, was run in an 11% denaturing polyacrylamide gel and stained with Coomassie blue.

Rad51B-Rad51C complex binds DNA and hydrolyzes ATP

Since Rad51B and Rad51C are involved in recombination, we tested the purified Rad51B-Rad51C complex for binding to DNA. Also because of the presence of Walker ATP binding motifs in these proteins, the complex was examined for the ability to hydrolyze ATP. As shown in Figure 5A, the Rad51B-Rad51C complex has an ATPase activity (kcat of 0.2/min) that is stimulated by DNA, with ssDNA (kcat of 0.4/min) being more effective than dsDNA (kcat of 0.25/min) in this regard. Using a DNA mobility shift assay, we found that the Rad51B-Rad51C complex binds ssDNA more than it

does dsDNA, as shifting of the ssDNA species occurred at a lower concentration of the protein complex (Figure 5B, panels I & II). To verify this conclusion, we co-incubated the ssDNA and dsDNA with the Rad51B-Rad51C complex. As shown in Figure 5C, only the ssDNA was shifted, thus confirming that Rad51B-Rad51C has a higher affinity for ssDNA. In these experiments, ATP was not included in the buffer used for the binding reaction. However, the inclusion of ATP or its substitution with the non-hydrolyzable ATP- γ -S did not affect the binding results appreciably.

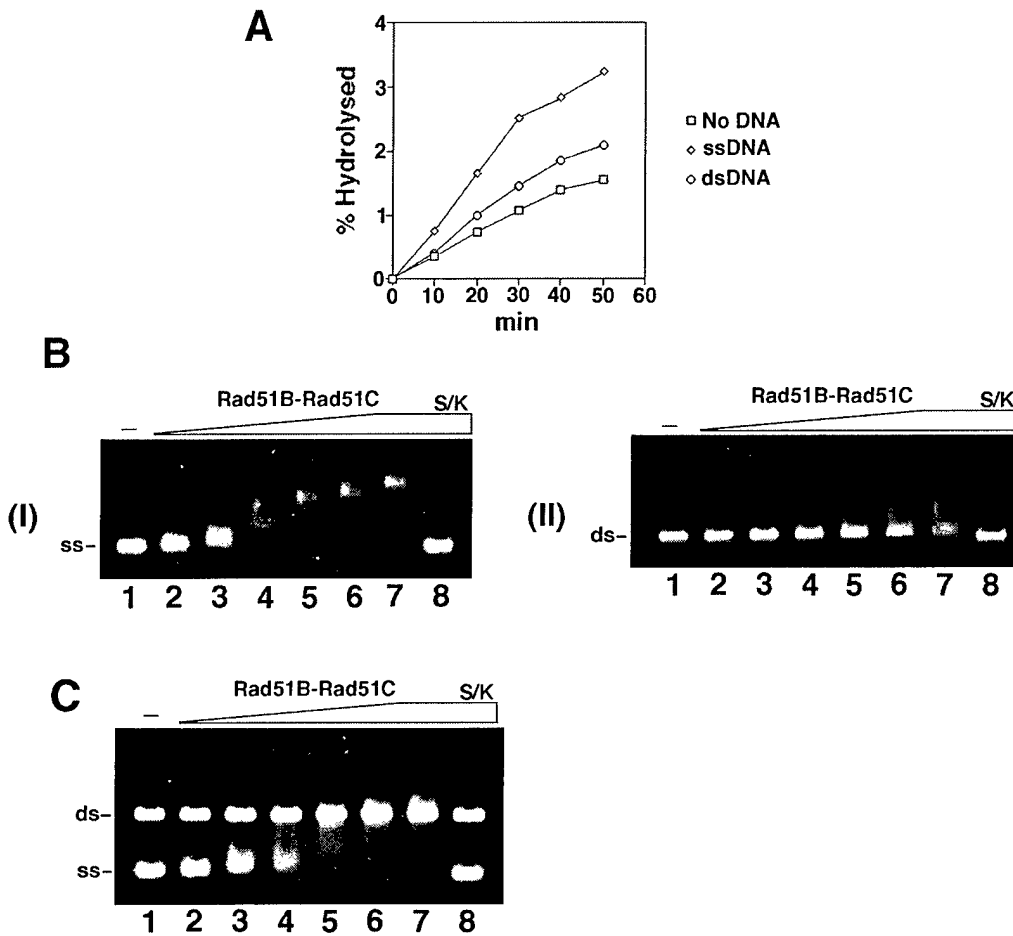


Figure 5. Rad51B-Rad51C complex has ATPase and DNA binding activities. **A.** The ATPase activity of the Rad51B-Rad51C complex was examined with ssDNA, dsDNA, or without any DNA. **B.** Increasing amounts of the Rad51B-Rad51C complex was incubated with ssDNA (I) or dsDNA (II). **C.** Increasing amounts of the Rad51B-Rad51C complex was incubated with a mixture of ssDNA and dsDNA. The reaction mixtures were run on an agarose gel and the DNA species stained with ethidium bromide. In all three panels, DNA alone was incubated in buffer and run in lane 1, and the reaction mixture containing the highest amount of Rad51B-Rad51C complex was treated with SDS and proteinase K (S/K) to release the bound DNA (lane 8).

BRCA2 and other recombination factors

Full length human BRCA2 protein with either a six histidine-tag or an HA-tag have been expressed in insect cells using recombinant baculoviruses. We are currently working on scaling up the insect cell

culture and devising a purification procedure for the BRCA2 protein. The BRCA2 studies are being done in collaboration with our colleague Wen Hwa Lee. In addition, we have cloned human RAD54 and XRCC2 and expressed their encoded products in insect cells. The Rad54 and XRCC2 proteins have already been purified to near homogeneity and are being characterized for DNA binding, ATPase and DNA supercoiling activities, and for physical and functional interactions with Rad51.

Future directions

We are in the process of examining the role of the Rad51B-Rad51C complex, XRCC2, and Rad54 in the DNA strand exchange reaction mediated by Rad51 and RPA. When purified BRCA2 protein becomes available, it will be included in the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction with Rad51 and other recombination factors to test its influence on the reaction efficiency.

APPENDED INFORMATION

(1) Key Research Accomplishments to date:

- Established procedure for the purification of the human Rad50/Mre11/NBS1 complex from nuclear extracts, and extensive biochemical characterization of this complex for activities germane for homologous recombination and DNA repair.
- Purification of human Rad51 and RPA and demonstration of functional cooperation between these two factors in the homologous DNA pairing and DNA strand exchange reaction central for the formation of heteroduplex DNA joints during homologous recombination and DNA repair.
- Demonstration that Rad51B and Rad51C are associated as a stable complex in human cells. Expression of Rad51B-Rad51C complex in insect cells and their purification.
- Cloning, expression, and purification of other human recombination factors including BRCA2, XRCC2, and Rad54.

(2) Reportable Outcome

Presentations:

- Invited Speaker, Gordon Research Conference on Mammalian DNA Repair, Ventura, CA. Title of Presentation "Mechanisms of Rad52 Group Recombination Factors".
- Invited Speaker, Gordon Research Conference on Radiation Oncology, Ventura, CA. Title of Presentation "A Hierarchy of Functional & Physical Interactions Among the RAD52 group Recombination Factors".
- Invited Speaker, Gordon Research Conference on Nucleic Acids. Providence, Rhode Island. "Functional Interactions Among Rad51, Rad54, and RPA in DNA Joint Formation".
- Invited Speaker, Workshop on DNA Repair and Recombination, organized by the National Institutes of Health. Title of Presentation "An Overview of Homologous Recombination Mechanism in Eukaryotic Cells".
- Invited Speaker, Colloquium on Links Between Recombination and Replication: Vital Roles of

- Recombination. Title of Presentation: "Roles of *RAD52* Group Genes and Proteins in Recombination and Repair". Organized by the US National Academy of Sciences.
- Invited Speaker, Workshop on "BRCA1 and Breast Cancers", Rockville, Maryland. "Functional Interactions that Govern the Integrity of the Homologous Recombination Machinery". Organized by the National Cancer Institute.

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Publications:

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Sung, P. (2001) Homologous genetic recombination in eukaryotes. *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences*. Nature/Scientific American publishing group. Macmillan Reference Limited. *In the press*.

Basis for Avid Homologous DNA Strand Exchange by Human Rad51 and RPA*

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Human Rad51 (hRad51), a member of a conserved family of general recombinases, is shown here to have an avid capability to make DNA joints between homologous DNA molecules and promote highly efficient DNA strand exchange of the paired molecules over at least 5.4 kilobase pairs. Furthermore, maximal efficiency of homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange is strongly dependent on the heterotrimeric single-stranded DNA binding factor hRPA and requires conditions that lessen interactions of the homologous duplex with the hRad51-single-stranded DNA nucleoprotein filament. The homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange system described should be valuable for dissecting the action mechanism of hRad51 and for deciphering its functional interactions with other recombination factors.

Genetic studies in various eukaryotic organisms have indicated that homologous recombination processes are mediated by a group of evolutionarily conserved genes known as the *RAD52* epistasis group. As revealed in studies on meiotic recombination and mating type switching in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, DNA double-strand breaks are formed and then processed exonucleolytically to yield long single-stranded tails with a 3' extremity. Nucleation of various *RAD52* group proteins onto these ssDNA¹ tails renders them recombinogenic, leading to the search for a homologous DNA target (sister chromatid or homologous chromosome), formation of DNA joints with the target, and an exchange of genetic information with it. The repair by recombination of DNA double-strand breaks induced by ionizing radiation and other DNA damaging agents very likely follows the same mechanistic route, as it too is dependent on genes of the *RAD52* epistasis group (reviewed in Refs. 1 and 2).

Among members of the *RAD52* group, the *RAD51*-encoded product is of particular interest because of its structural and functional similarities to the *Escherichia coli* recombination protein RecA (2–5). RecA promotes the pairing and strand exchange between homologous DNA molecules to form heteroduplex DNA (4, 5), an enzymatic activity believed to be germane for the central role of RecA in recombination and DNA repair processes. Likewise, homologous DNA pairing and

strand exchange activities have been shown for *S. cerevisiae* Rad51 (yRad51) (6). Under optimized conditions, the length of heteroduplex DNA joints formed by yRad51 and RecA can extend over quite a few kilobase pairs (4, 5, 7).

In published studies, human Rad51 (hRad51) was found to have the ability to make DNA joints but the maximal potential for forming only about 1 kilobase pairs of heteroduplex DNA (8–11). Furthermore, while yRad51 and RecA require their cognate single-strand DNA binding factors, SSB and yRPA, for optimal recombinase activity, hRPA has been suggested to stimulate the hRad51-mediated homologous pairing and strand exchange reaction only when the hRad51 concentration is suboptimal (9, 10).

Given the central role of hRad51 in recombination processes and the fact that the activities of hRad51 are apparently subject to modulation by tumor suppressor proteins such as BRCA2 (reviewed in Ref. 12), establishing an efficient hRad51-mediated DNA strand exchange system will be important for dissecting the functional interactions among hRad51, other recombination factors, and tumor suppressors. In this work, a variety of reaction parameters that could influence the recombinase activity of hRad51 were explored. We demonstrate that under certain conditions, hRad51 makes DNA joints avidly and promotes highly efficient strand exchange over at least 5.4 kilobase pairs. Importantly, under the new reaction conditions, the efficiency of the hRad51-mediated DNA strand exchange reaction is strongly dependent on hRPA over a wide range of Rad51 concentrations tested.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

DNA Substrates— ϕ X174 viral (+)-strand was purchased from New England Biolabs and ϕ X174 replicative form I DNA was from Life Technologies, Inc. The replicative form I DNA was linearized with *Apa*LI. The pBluescript DNA was prepared from *E. coli* XL-1 Blue (Stratagene), purified by banding in cesium chloride gradients, and linearized with *Bsa*I. The oligonucleotides (83-mer) used in strand exchange were: oligo 1, 5'-AAATGAACATAAGATAAATAAGTATAAGGATAATACAAAATAAGTAAATGAATAAACATAGAAAATAAGTAAAGGATATAAA; oligo 2, the exact complement of oligo 1. Oligo 2 was labeled at the 5' end with [γ -³²P]ATP and T4 polynucleotide kinase and then annealed to oligo 1. The labeled duplex was purified from 10% polyacrylamide gels by overnight diffusion at 4 °C into TAE buffer (40 mM Tris acetate, pH 7.4, 0.5 mM EDTA). DNA substrates were stored in TE (10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, with 0.5 mM EDTA).

Plasmids—Plasmid pRh51.1 consists of human *RAD51* K313 cDNA under the control of the T7 promoter in vector pET11 (Novagen). Plasmid pRh51.1 was then subject to *in vitro* mutagenesis using the QuikChange kit (Stratagene), to change Lys³¹³ (AAA codon) to a glutamine residue (CAA codon). The resulting plasmid, pRh51.2, was sequenced to ensure that no other undesired change has occurred in the *RAD51* sequence. Plasmid p11d-tRPA (13), which coexpresses all three subunits of hRPA, was used for purification of this factor.

Cell Growth—Plasmids pRh51.1 and pRh51.2 were introduced into the RecA-deficient *E. coli* strain BLR (DE3) with pLysS. Following transformation, single clones were picked and grown for 15 h in 30 ml of Luria broth. The starter culture was diluted 200 times with fresh

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¹ The abbreviations used are: ssDNA, single-stranded DNA; dsDNA, double-stranded DNA.

Luria broth and incubated at 37 °C. When the A_{600} of the cultures reached 0.6 to 1, isopropyl-1-thio- β -D-galactopyranoside was added to 0.4 mM and the induction of hRad51 continued at 37 °C for 4 h. Cells were harvested by centrifugation and stored frozen at -70 °C. Plasmid p11d-tRPA was introduced into *E. coli* strain BL21 (DE3) and the induction of hRPA was carried out as described previously (13).

Protein Purification—All the following steps were carried out at 4 °C. For the purification of hRad51 Lys³¹³ and hRad51 Gln³¹³ proteins, *E. coli* cell paste, 30 g from 20 liters of culture, was suspended in 150 ml cell breakage buffer (50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 5 mM EDTA, 200 mM KCl, 2 mM dithiothreitol, 10% sucrose, and the following protease inhibitors: aprotinin, chymostatin, leupeptin, and pepstatin A at 3 μ g/ml each, and 1 mM phenylmethylsulfonyl fluoride) and then passed through a French press once at 20,000 p.s.i. The crude lysate was clarified by centrifugation (100,000 $\times g$, 120 min), and the supernatant (Fraction I) was treated with ammonium sulfate at 0.23 g/ml to precipitate hRad51 and about 20% of the total extract protein. The ammonium sulfate pellet was dissolved in 300 ml of T buffer (30 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.4, 10% glycerol, 0.5 mM EDTA, 0.5 mM dithiothreitol) with the set of protease inhibitors used in extract preparation, and then clarified by centrifugation (10,000 $\times g$ for 30 min). The cleared protein solution (Fraction II) was then applied onto a column of Q-Sepharose (2.6 \times 6 cm; total 30-ml matrix) equilibrated in T buffer with 100 mM KCl and eluted with a 400 ml of gradient of 100 to 600 mM KCl in T buffer. The peak of hRad51 (Fraction III), eluting at about 330 mM KCl (60 ml), was dialyzed against T buffer with 100 mM KCl and then fractionated in a column of Affi-Gel Blue (Bio-Rad; 1.6 \times 5 cm; total 10-ml matrix) with a 100-ml gradient of 100 to 2000 mM KCl in T buffer. The hRad51 protein eluted from Affi-Gel Blue at 800 to 1200 mM KCl, and the pool of which (Fraction IV; 20 ml) was dialyzed against T buffer with 100 mM KCl and fractionated in a column of Macro hydroxyapatite (Bio-Rad; 1 \times 7.5 cm; total 6-ml matrix) with a 100-ml 30 to 320 mM KH_2PO_4 gradient in buffer T. hRad51 eluted from 150 to 220 mM KH_2PO_4 , and the peak fractions were pooled (Fraction V; 15 ml containing 7.5 mg of hRad51), dialyzed against T buffer with 50 mM KCl, and applied onto a Mono S column (HR5/5), which was developed with a 30-ml 100 to 400 mM KCl gradient in buffer T. The Mono S fractions containing the peak of hRad51, eluting at about 250 mM KCl, were pooled (Fraction VI; 4 ml containing 6 mg of hRad51), diluted with an equal volume of 10% glycerol and then fractionated in Mono Q (HR 5/5) with a 30-ml 100 to 600 mM KCl gradient. The final pool of hRad51 (Fraction VII; 3 ml containing 5 mg of hRad51 in ~350 mM KCl) was concentrated in Centricon-30 microconcentrators and stored at -70 °C. The hRad51 concentration was determined using the calculated molar extinction coefficient of 12,800 $\text{M}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-1}$ at 280 nm (10).

For the purification of hRPA, extract was made from *E. coli* BL21 (DE3) harboring the plasmid p11d-tRPA (13) and subjected to the purification procedure we have used for yRPA (14). The concentration of hRPA was determined by comparison of multiple loadings of hRPA against known amounts of bovine serum albumin and ovalbumin in a Coomassie Blue R-stained polyacrylamide gel.

DNA Strand Exchange System That Uses ϕ X174 DNA—All the reaction steps were carried out at 37 °C. In Fig. 2, the reaction (50 μ l final volume) was assembled by mixing hRad51 (7.5 μ M) added in 2 μ l of storage buffer and ϕ X174 viral (+)-strand (30 μ M nucleotides) added in 2 μ l in 40 μ l of buffer R (40 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.8, 2 mM ATP, 1 mM MgCl_2 , 1 mM dithiothreitol, and an ATP regenerating system consisting of 8 mM creatine phosphate and 28 μ g/ml creatine kinase). After a 5-min incubation, hRPA (2 μ M) in 2 μ l of storage buffer was added, followed by a 5-min incubation, and then 5 μ l of ammonium sulfate (1 M stock, final concentration of 100 mM), followed by another 1-min incubation. To complete the reaction, linear ϕ X174 replicative form I DNA (30 μ M nucleotides) in 3 μ l of TE and 4 μ l of 50 mM spermidine (4 mM) were incorporated. At the indicated times, 4.5- μ l portions were withdrawn, mixed with 7 μ l of 0.8% SDS and 800 μ g/ml proteinase K, incubated for 15 min before electrophoresis in 0.9% agarose gels in TAE buffer. The gels were stained in ethidium bromide (2 μ g/ml in H_2O) for 1 h, destained for 12 to 18 h in a large volume of water, and then subjected to image analysis in a NucleoTech gel documentation station equipped with a CCD camera using Gel Expert for quantification of the data. Unless stated otherwise, the reaction mixtures in other experiments were assembled in the same manner with the indicated amounts and order of addition of reaction components, except that they were scaled down two and one-half times.

DNA Strand Exchange System That Employs Oligonucleotides—The reaction mixture had a final volume of 12.5 μ l and the steps were carried out at 37 °C. hRad51 (7.5 μ M) was incubated with oligonucleotide 2 (30 μ M nucleotides) in 10 μ l of buffer R. The reaction mixture was

completed by adding ammonium sulfate in 1 μ l, 1 μ l of 50 mM spermidine, and the radiolabeled duplex (30 μ M nucleotides) in 0.5 μ l. At all the times indicated, a 3- μ l portion of the reaction mixture was deproteinized as described above and then subjected to electrophoresis in 10% polyacrylamide gels run in TAE buffer. The level of DNA strand exchange was determined by PhosphorImager analysis of the dried gels.

Examination of Interaction between hRad51-ssDNA Filament and Duplex DNA—Oligonucleotides F1 and F1b (Midland) both have the sequence 5'-TGGCTTGAACGCGTCATGGAAGCGATAAACTCTGCA-GGTTGGATACGCCAATCATTTTTATCGAAGCGCGCCGCC-3', except that the latter also contains a biotin molecule positioned at the 5' terminus. In these oligonucleotides, nucleotide residues 11 to 72 are complementary to positions 5348 to 23 of the ϕ X (+)-strand DNA. These oligonucleotides were hybridized to ϕ X (+)-strand by incubating a 3 M excess of the oligonucleotide with the latter in buffer containing 50 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 10 mM MgCl_2 , 100 mM NaCl, and 1 mM dithiothreitol. The F1- ϕ X (+)-strand and F1b- ϕ X (+)-strand hybrids (30 μ M nucleotides) were mixed with 10 μ l of magnetic beads containing streptavidin (Roche Molecular Biochemicals) in binding buffer containing 10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 100 mM KCl, and 1 mM EDTA for 10 min at 37 °C. About 70% of the F1b-(+)-strand hybrid was immobilized on the beads, whereas, as expected, less than 5% of the F1-(+)-strand hybrid was retained. To assemble hRad51 filament on the immobilized ϕ X (+)-strand, magnetic beads preloaded with the F1b- ϕ X (+)-strand hybrid were incubated with 4 μ M hRad51 in 20 μ l of buffer R. Reproducibly, ~85% of the hRad51 was bound to the magnetic beads under the stated conditions, as determined by eluting the bound hRad51 with 2% SDS followed by SDS-polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis and staining with Coomassie Blue; this procedure gave an immobilized hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein complex of ~3 nucleotides/hRad51 monomer. The magnetic beads containing hRad51-ssDNA complex was then washed once each with 20 μ l of buffer R with 0.01% Nonidet P-40 and 20 μ l buffer R, before being incubated with linear ϕ X duplex (8 μ M nucleotides) for 3 min at 37 °C in 20 μ l of buffer R containing 4 mM spermidine and the indicated concentrations of ammonium sulfate. The beads were treated with 20 μ l of 2% SDS at 37 °C for 5 min to elute bound duplex and hRad51. The supernatants and SDS eluates were analyzed in agarose gels followed by staining with ethidium bromide to quantify DNA and in polyacrylamide gels with Coomassie Blue staining to determine the amount of hRad51. As controls, magnetic beads alone, magnetic beads preincubated with the F1- ϕ X (+)-strand hybrid, and magnetic beads preincubated with F1b but without ϕ X (+)-strand were similarly incubated with the linear ϕ X duplex and then processed for analyses.

RESULTS

Recombination Factors—The cDNA for hRad51 was amplified from a human B-cell cDNA library. Sequencing of the hRAD51 cDNA insert revealed that it was identical to one of the published hRAD51 sequences (15) but differed from the other sequence (16) at amino acid residue 313; the former has a lysine (an AAA codon) while the latter has a glutamine (a CAA codon) at this position. The cloned cDNA was subjected to targeted mutagenesis to change lysine 313 to glutamine. Both hRad51 Lys³¹³ and hRad51 Gln³¹³ variants were expressed in *E. coli* and purified to near homogeneity (Fig. 1A). The two hRad51 isoforms behaved identically during purification and gave indistinguishable results in all the enzymatic assays described here. Only the results with hRad51 Lys³¹³ are shown. We presume that the two hRad51 isoforms correspond to naturally occurring polymorphic variants. For DNA strand exchange experiments, the human ssDNA binding factor replication protein A (hRPA), a heterotrimer of 70-, 32-, and 14-kDa subunits, was also purified to near homogeneity (Fig. 1B) from *E. coli* cells harboring a plasmid which coexpresses all three subunits of this factor (13).

System for ATP-dependent Homologous DNA Pairing and Strand Exchange—For characterizing the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange activity of hRad51, we used as substrates ϕ X 174 viral (+)-strand and linear duplex that are 5.4 kilobase pairs in length (Ref. 6; schematic shown in Fig. 2A). In this system, hRad51 is preincubated with the (+)-strand, followed by the addition of hRPA, and the linear duplex

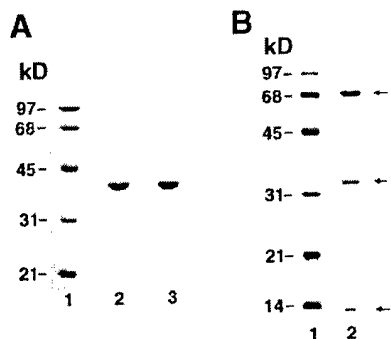


FIG. 1. Recombination factors. A, purified hRad51 Lys³¹³ (lane 2) and hRad51 Gln³¹³ (lane 3), 3 μ g each, were analyzed in an 11% SDS-polyacrylamide gel and stained with Coomassie Blue. B, purified hRPA, 3 μ g in lane 2, was analyzed in a 12.5% SDS-polyacrylamide gel and stained with Coomassie Blue. The three subunits of hRPA are denoted by the arrows.

is incorporated last. Pairing between the DNA substrates yields a joint molecule, and branch migration, if successful, over 5.4 kilobase pairs produces nicked circular duplex as product (Fig. 2A). We have examined a variety of reaction conditions including the levels of magnesium, pH, and various types of salt on the hRad51 recombinase activity. As documented below, the most dramatic effects were seen with the addition of salts.

We tested the effects of increasing concentrations of potassium acetate, potassium chloride, potassium phosphate, potassium sulfate, ammonium chloride, and ammonium sulfate, and found that while all of these salts were stimulatory, ammonium sulfate produced the most stimulation, followed by potassium sulfate. Panel I in Fig. 2B shows a time course experiment in which 7.5 μ M hRad51 was used with 2 μ M hRPA, ϕ X (+)-strand (30 μ M nucleotides), and ϕ X linear duplex (30 μ M nucleotides) in pH 7.8 buffer and 100 mM ammonium sulfate. Following the published conditions of Baumann and West (9, 10), another reaction was also carried out in which hRad51, at 5 μ M, was used with 1 μ M hRPA and the same concentrations of DNA substrates and 80 mM potassium acetate at pH 7.5 (Fig. 2B, panel II). The results showed a much higher level of DNA strand exchange under the new conditions. Specifically, whereas no full strand exchange product (nicked circular duplex) was detected under the published conditions (Fig. 2, B, panel II, and C, panel I) (9, 10), the inclusion of ammonium sulfate resulted in conversion of ~30 and ~60% of the linear duplex to nicked circular duplex after 30 and 60 min, respectively (Fig. 2, B, panel I, and C, panel I). Overall, there was a 3–4-fold increase in total products (joint molecules plus nicked circular duplex) in the reaction that employed ammonium sulfate (Fig. 2C, panel II). Even though 100 mM ammonium sulfate was found to be optimal, highly significant levels of homologous DNA pairing and complete DNA strand exchange were seen at reduced concentrations (50 and 75 mM) of the salt (data not shown).

In published studies (9, 10), 80 mM potassium acetate was employed. In agreement with the published work (9, 10), neither higher (up to 200 mM in 20 mM increments) nor lower concentrations of potassium acetate would improve homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange efficiency beyond the level seen in panel II of Fig. 2B. As expected from published work (8), omission of ATP from the reaction abolished strand exchange, either under our reaction conditions (Fig. 2B, panel I, lanes 10–12) or the published conditions (Fig. 2B, panel II, lanes 11–13) (9, 10).

Thus, the inclusion of ammonium sulfate renders hRad51-mediated ATP-dependent homologous DNA pairing and strand

exchange highly efficient. Under the new reaction conditions, the optimal levels of hRad51 for pairing and strand exchange were found to be between 2 and 4 nucleotides/protein monomer. Increasing hRad51 above 2 nucleotides/protein monomer resulted in gradual inhibition (data not shown), which was likely due to binding of hRad51 to the duplex and its sequestration from pairing with the hRad51-ssDNA complex (7, 9).

Dependence on hRPA—In the yRad51-mediated DNA strand exchange reaction that uses plasmid length DNA substrates, a strong dependence of the reaction efficiency on yRPA has been observed (2, 4). However, in the published work, when hRad51 was used at the optimal ratio of 3 nucleotides of ssDNA/hRad51 monomer, hRPA has no stimulatory effect on the reaction efficiency, and relatively high levels of hRPA have been strongly inhibitory (9, 10). We have examined whether under the newly devised reaction conditions, hRPA is required for strand exchange efficiency. Fig. 3 summarizes the results obtained with 7.5 μ M hRad51, 30 μ M nucleotides of ssDNA, 100 mM ammonium sulfate, and increasing concentrations of hRPA, from 0.4 to 4.0 μ M. Whereas only negligible pairing and strand exchange was seen in the absence of hRPA, increasing concentrations of hRPA gave progressively higher levels of products (Fig. 3, panels I and II). The optimal level of hRPA was ~2 μ M, although addition of as little as 0.4 μ M hRPA gave highly notable stimulation. Importantly, increasing the hRPA concentration to 4 μ M did not lower the level of products, which is very different from published studies (10) in which concentrations of hRPA \geq 0.8 μ M were found to be strongly inhibitory.

Additional experiments revealed that at levels of hRad51 higher (2 nucleotides/hRad51 monomer) or lower (6 nucleotides/hRad51 monomer) than that (4 nucleotides/hRad51 monomer) used in Fig. 3, there is also a similar dependence of homologous pairing and strand exchange on hRPA. Likewise, at ammonium sulfate levels higher and lower than that used in prior experiments, we have also observed a similar dependence of the strand exchange reaction on hRPA. Control experiments confirmed that hRPA by itself does not have homologous pairing and strand exchange activity under the new conditions (data not shown). In summary, under our reaction conditions, there is a uniform dependence of DNA strand exchange on hRPA, regardless of the amount of hRad51 used.

Effect of Order of Addition of Salt and Heterologous DNA—In the experiments described thus far, ammonium sulfate was added to the reaction mixture after hRad51 had already nucleated onto the ssDNA but before the incorporation of hRPA. We have also examined whether the addition of ammonium sulfate at other stages would affect the reaction efficiency, as such an endeavor could yield important clues as to the basis of stimulation. As shown in Fig. 4, similar levels of homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange were observed when ammonium sulfate was added at the beginning with hRad51, after hRad51 but before the incorporation of hRPA (as in the standard reaction), and after hRPA but before the incorporation of the duplex. Interestingly, when ammonium sulfate was incorporated a few minutes after the duplex, there was little product formed even at the reaction end point of 60 min (Fig. 4A, lanes 11–13). Since dsDNA coated with hRad51 or yRad51 has been found to be inactive in the DNA strand exchange reaction (7, 9), we considered the possibility that perhaps the suppression of DNA strand exchange seen with ammonium sulfate being added after the duplex might have stemmed from free hRad51 binding to the duplex (7). However, two lines of evidence strongly suggest that this was not the main reason for the lack of strand exchange stimulation. First, even at levels of hRad51 (6 nucleotides and 9 nucleotides of ssDNA/hRad51 monomer) lower than that (4 nucleotides ssDNA/hRad51 monomer) used in Fig.

FIG. 2. Homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange by hRad51 and hRPA. A, schematic of the reaction. The ϕ X174 viral (+)-strand (ss) is paired with the linear homologous duplex (ds) to form joint molecules (jm), and strand exchange over the length of the DNA (5.4 kilobase pairs) yields nicked circular duplex (nc) and linear ssDNA as products. B, hRad51-mediated homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange. Panel I shows reactions carried out with ammonium sulfate as salt and with ATP (lanes 1–9) or without ATP (lanes 10–12). The reactant concentrations were: 7.5 μ M hRad51, 2 μ M hRPA, 30 μ M (in nucleotides) each of ssDNA and dsDNA. Panel II shows reactions carried out as described by Baumann and West (9, 10), with ATP (lanes 1–10) or without it (lanes 11–13). The reactant concentrations were: 5 μ M hRad51, 1 μ M hRPA, and 30 μ M (in nucleotides) each of ssDNA and dsDNA. C, in panel I, the time courses of conversion of the input linear duplex into nicked circular duplex in the experiments in panels I (●) and II (○) of B are graphed. In panel II, the time courses of conversion of the input linear duplex into total products (joint molecules and nicked circular duplex) in the experiments in panels I (●) and II (○) of B are graphed.

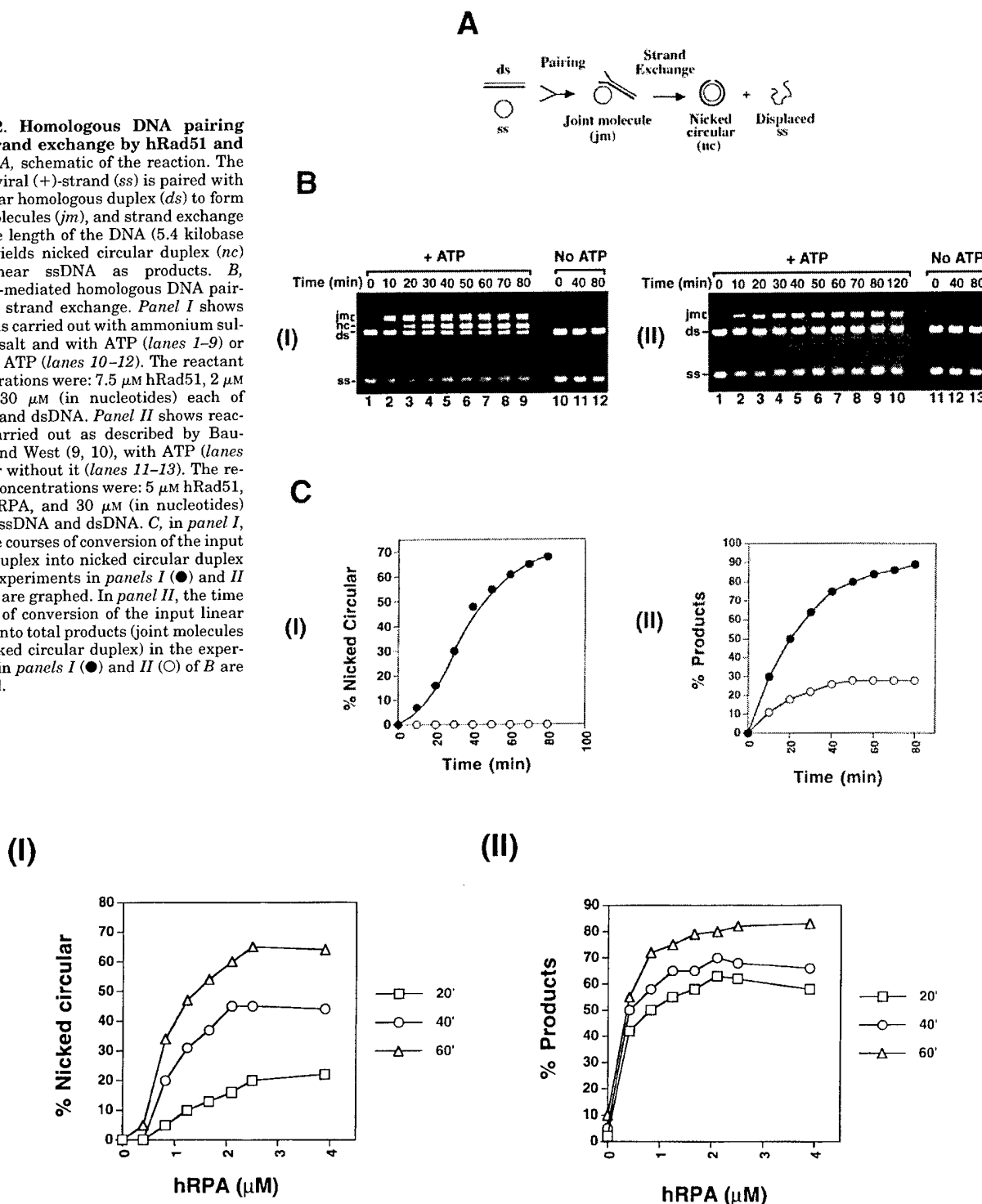


FIG. 3. Dependence of homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange on hRPA. hRad51 at 7.5 μ M was incubated with 30 μ M ϕ X ssDNA with or without increasing concentrations of hRPA, and the resulting hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filaments were reacted with linear ϕ X dsDNA for 20 (□), 40 (○), and 60 (△) min. In panel I, the level of full DNA strand exchange, as measured by the percent conversion of the input linear duplex to nicked circular duplex, was graphed. In panel II, the level of total products, joint molecules plus nicked circular duplex, was graphed.

4 and with much longer preincubation of hRad51 with ssDNA to minimize the level of free hRad51, addition of ammonium sulfate before the duplex molecule is still necessary to see significant strand exchange (data not shown). Second, an excess of a heterologous duplex (pBluescript) added together with the homologous duplex or before the homologous duplex, in an attempt to titrate out any free hRad51, also did not compensate

for the stimulatory effect of adding ammonium sulfate before the homologous duplex (see below). Taken together, the results strongly suggested that the lack of DNA strand exchange when ammonium sulfate was incorporated after the homologous duplex was due to a reason other than free hRad51 coating the duplex molecule.

Interestingly, whereas the incorporation of increasing

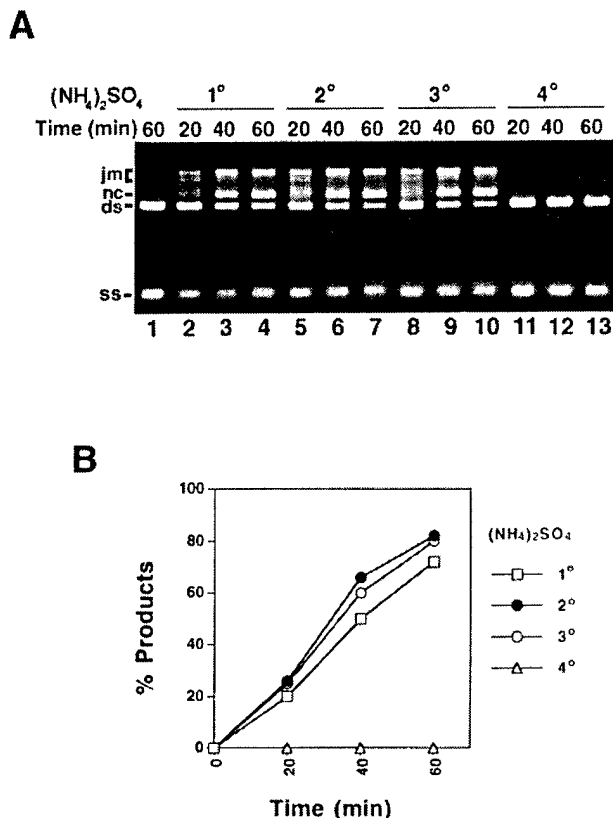


FIG. 4. Order of addition of salt is critical for reaction efficiency. A, ammonium sulfate (100 mM) was added at the same time as hRad51 to ϕ X ssDNA (1°), after ϕ X ssDNA had been preincubated with hRad51 (2°), after ϕ X ssDNA had been preincubated first with hRad51 and then with hRPA (3°), or added 3 min after the duplex had already been incorporated into the reaction (4°). The complete reaction mixtures were incubated for 20, 40, and 60 min and processed for gel analysis. In lane 1, DNA substrates were incubated in the absence of recombination proteins. The reactant concentrations were: hRad51 at 7.5 μ M, ϕ X ssDNA at 30 μ M nucleotides, hRPA at 2 μ M, and ϕ X dsDNA at 30 μ M nucleotides. B, the levels of total products, joint molecules plus nicked circular duplex, were graphed.

amounts of the heterologous pBluescript duplex in the presence of ammonium sulfate lowered the reaction efficiency only slightly (Fig. 5, A, panel I, and B, panel I), the addition of pBluescript duplex before ammonium sulfate resulted in much more pronounced inhibition (Fig. 5, A, panel II, and B, panel II). These results, coupled with those presented above, indicated that binding of duplex to the hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament, regardless of whether the duplex is homologous to the ssDNA situated in the hRad51 filament, has a strong suppressive effect on pairing and strand exchange, unless salt is already present.

In summary, the results have revealed a strict dependence of homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange efficiency on ammonium sulfate being incorporated into the reaction prior to the duplex, and they suggest that ammonium sulfate exerts its stimulatory effect via modulation of the interactions between the hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein complex and the incoming duplex molecule. This premise is further tested and verified in the experiments below.

Dependence of Strand Exchange Efficiency on Interactions between Duplex and hRad51-ssDNA Complex—Extensive biochemical studies conducted with RecA have revealed that the incoming duplex molecule is bound only transiently within the RecA-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament (4, 5, see "Discussion"). We reasoned that if the hRad51-ssDNA filament has a rela-

tively high affinity for the duplex, then the DNA homology search process might occur efficiently only when the association of the duplex molecule and the hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament is rendered transient, which could conceivably be realized by salt inclusion.

Intrinsic to this hypothesis are two predictions. First, it might be expected that the salt dependence of the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange process would be lessened with reduction in the length of the DNA substrates, such as when oligonucleotides are used (11) (see Fig. 6A for schematic). This is because the extent of interactions of a short duplex with the limited length of hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament assembled on a short single-strand would not be extensive. Furthermore, the search for DNA homology with short DNA substrates would not be as rate-limiting as when ϕ X DNA substrates are used, because the probability of productive collisions between two short substrates leading to their homologous registry should be considerably higher. As predicted, when the DNA substrates used were based on 83-mer oligonucleotides, the rate of homologous pairing between the substrates was the same in the absence of salt as when ammonium sulfate was present at 25 mM, and higher levels of ammonium sulfate were in fact inhibitory (Fig. 6, B and C).

Second, if salt indeed acted to weaken the interaction between the duplex and the hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein complex, then we would expect to see lessened binding of the duplex molecule to the hRad51-ssDNA complex when ammonium sulfate was present. To test this premise experimentally, we examined the interaction of ϕ X linear dsDNA with hRad51- ϕ X ssDNA complex immobilized on streptavidin magnetic beads via a short biotinylated oligonucleotide, called F1b, which is complementary to a portion of the ϕ X (+)-strand (see schematic in panel I of Fig. 7A and "Experimental Procedures"). Analysis of the SDS eluate of the magnetic beads allowed us to determine the amount of duplex DNA that had bound to the immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex (Fig. 7A, panel I). As shown in Fig. 7A, lanes 1 and 2 in panel II, incubation of the duplex with bead-immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex in the absence of ammonium sulfate resulted in >90% retention of the duplex on the beads. Binding of the duplex to the magnetic beads was due to its interaction with the immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex, because little retention of the duplex DNA occurred with magnetic beads pretreated with hRad51 and ϕ X (+)-strand hybridized to an oligonucleotide, F1, that had identical sequence to F1b but lacked the biotin tag of the latter (Fig. 7A, lanes 3 and 4 in panel II). As expected, only the background level of duplex retention was seen with beads containing the F1b- ϕ X (+)-strand hybrid but without hRad51, with DNA-free beads preincubated with hRad51, and with beads that contained only the F1b oligonucleotide and preincubated with hRad51 (Fig. 7A, lanes 5–10 in panel II).

Once the utility of the assay system was verified, we proceeded to test the effect of ammonium sulfate on the interactions of duplex DNA with the immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex. The results revealed gradual weakening of the duplex/hRad51-ssDNA complex interactions by increasing levels of ammonium sulfate. Specifically, whereas greater than 90% retention of the duplex occurred in the absence of ammonium sulfate, less than 10% of the duplex was bound at 100 mM of the salt (Fig. 7, B, upper panel, and C). Analysis of the amount of hRad51 in the various SDS eluates showed that even the highest concentration of ammonium sulfate did not cause significant turnover of hRad51 from the bound ssDNA (Fig. 7B, lower panel). Taken together, we concluded that ammonium sulfate indeed weakens the binding of duplex DNA to the hRad51-

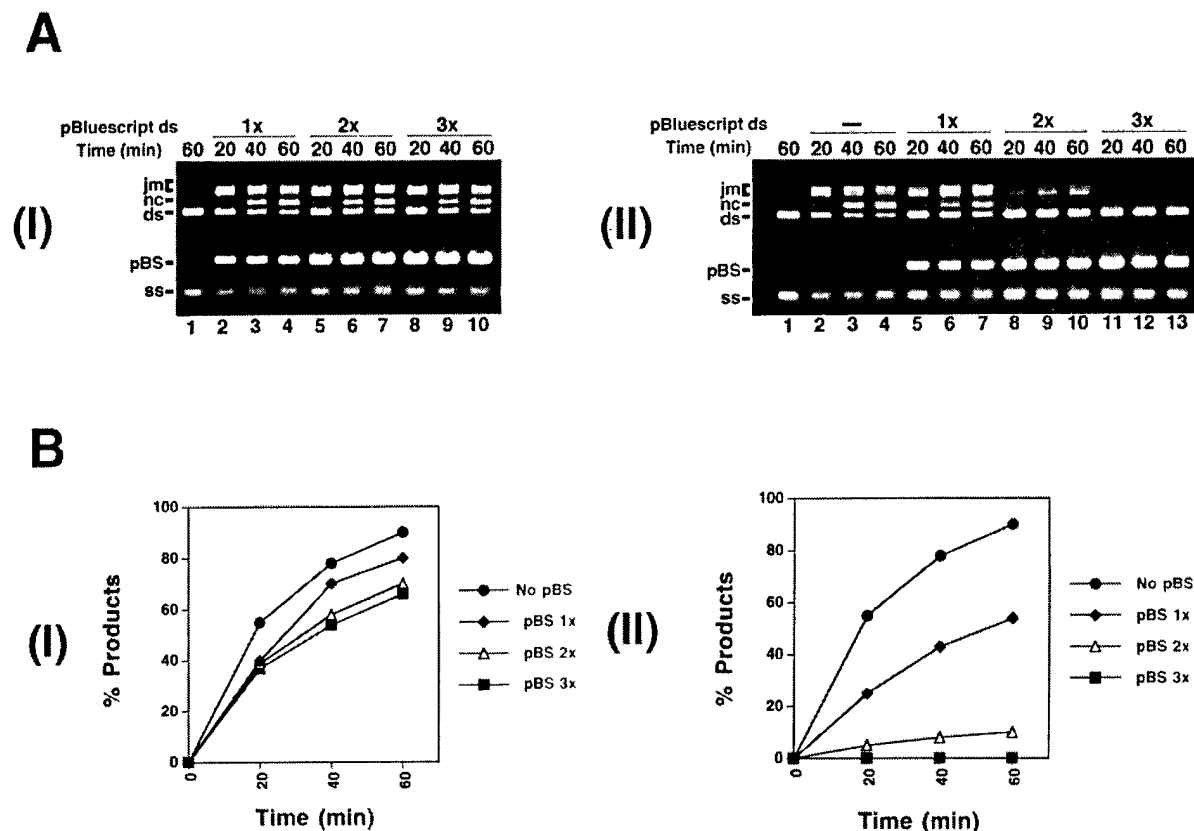


FIG. 5. Effect of heterologous duplex. A, increasing concentrations of pBluescript (1 to 3 times the concentration of ϕ X dsDNA) was added in the presence of ammonium sulfate (panel I) or 3 min before the incorporation of ammonium sulfate (panel II) to presynaptic complex assembled with hRad51 (7.5 μ M), hRPA (2 μ M), and ϕ X ssDNA (30 μ M nucleotides). Following the incorporation of ϕ X duplex (30 μ M nucleotides), the reaction mixtures were incubated for the indicated times. The concentration of ammonium sulfate was 100 mM. In lane 1 of both panels, DNA substrates were incubated in the absence of recombination proteins. B, the levels of total products, joint molecules plus nicked circular duplex, in A were graphed. Panel I shows the levels of products (joint molecules and nicked circular duplex) when pBluescript was added after ammonium sulfate and panel II shows the levels of products when pBluescript was added before ammonium sulfate.

ssDNA complex. Other experiments revealed that pBluescript duplex also binds to the immobilized hRad51- ϕ X ssDNA complex in a manner that is reduced by ammonium sulfate (data not shown), indicating that the hRad51-ssDNA complex can interact with both homologous and heterologous duplex molecules.

Interestingly, potassium acetate lessened the interaction between the duplex and the immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex only slightly (Fig. 7C), and as expected, the hRad51-ssDNA complex was stable to potassium acetate (data not shown). Since potassium acetate is much less effective in the homologous pairing and strand exchange reaction (Fig. 2) (9, 10), the observation in Fig. 7C is again consistent with the suggestion that ammonium sulfate stimulates homologous pairing and strand exchange by attenuating the affinity of the hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament for the incoming duplex.

In the DNA strand exchange experiments, we found that the order of addition of ammonium sulfate relative to duplex DNA was important for ensuring strand exchange efficiency, such that if duplex DNA was added before ammonium sulfate, only negligible pairing and strand exchange was observed (see Fig. 4). Given this observation, we wanted to test whether the level of duplex retention by bead-immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex would change with the order of addition of ammonium sulfate. To examine this, we used three different concentrations of ammonium sulfate (25, 50, and 100 mM) and added the salt either before the incorporation of duplex or after the duplex had already been preincubated with the bead-immobilized hRad51-ssDNA complex. The results from this experiment re-

vealed that more of the duplex becomes associated with the hRad51-ssDNA complex with preincubation of duplex and Rad51-ssDNA complex prior to salt addition (Fig. 7D).

The experiments in Fig. 7 were conducted with hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein complex assembled in the absence of hRPA. We have obtained similar results when hRPA was included in the binding reaction (data not shown).

DISCUSSION

Homologous DNA Pairing and Strand Exchange by hRad51 and hRPA—Both hRad51 and yRad51 are related in amino acid sequence and biological function to *E. coli* RecA. Like RecA, yRad51 forms nucleoprotein filaments on ssDNA and dsDNA in an ATP-dependent manner. Biochemical studies have indicated that the search for DNA homology in the incoming duplex DNA molecule and formation of heteroduplex joints with the duplex occur within the confines of the RecA-ssDNA and yRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filaments, which are also referred to presynaptic filaments. The assembly of the recombinase-ssDNA nucleoprotein filaments and the efficiency of subsequent homologous pairing and strand exchange are stimulated by the single-strand binding factor, SSB for RecA and yRPA for yRad51 (2, 4, 5). In the presence of ATP, hRad51 also forms a filament on ssDNA similar in structure to the equivalent nucleoprotein filaments assembled with RecA and yRad51 (3–5). However, published studies have suggested that hRad51 has only a modest ability to make DNA joints and an even lower capacity to promote DNA strand exchange. These published observations have suggested that either hRad51 partic-

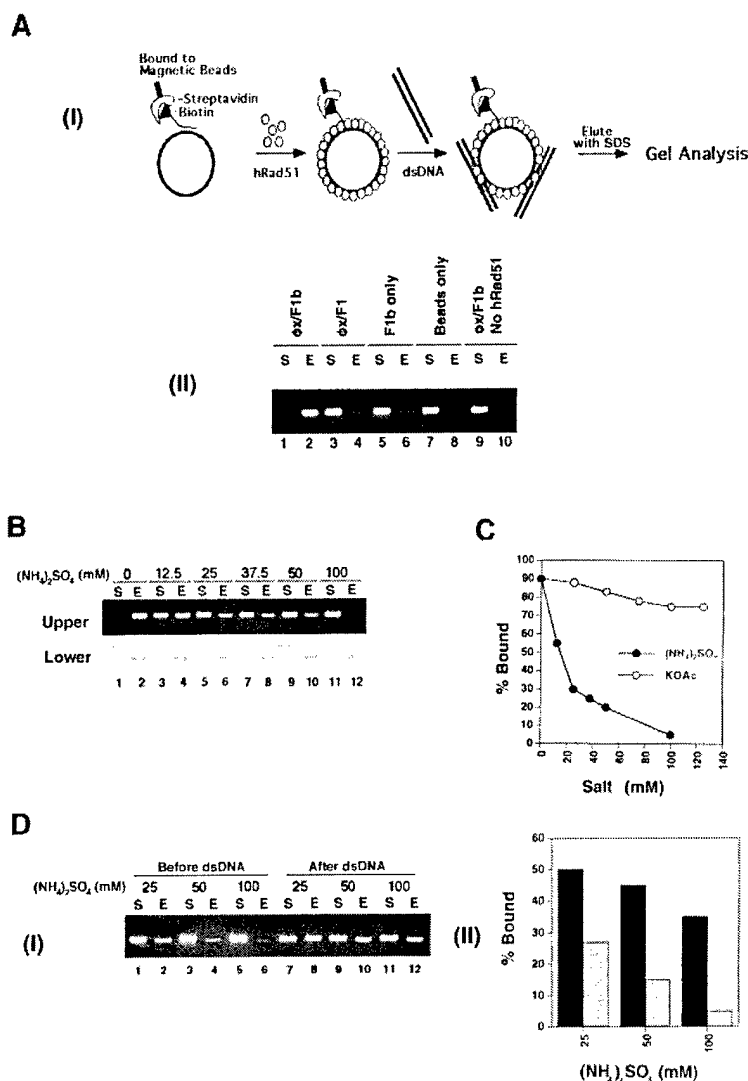


FIG. 7. Salt lessens interactions between duplex and hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament. *A, panel I*, the assay scheme is summarized. Briefly, ϕ X (+)-strand hybridized to the biotinylated oligonucleotide F1b is immobilized on streptavidin magnetic beads via the biotin tag. hRad51 filament is assembled on the (+)-strand and then mixed with ϕ X duplex DNA. The bound duplex and hRad51 are eluted by SDS and analyzed. To verify the utility of the assay (*panel II*), beads containing ϕ X (+)-strand-F1b hybrid (ϕ X-F1b; lanes 1 and 2), beads preincubated with ϕ X (+)-strand hybridized to the nonbiotinylated oligonucleotide F1 (ϕ X-F1; lanes 3 and 4), beads with F1b but no ϕ X (+)-strand (F1b only; lanes 5 and 6), and beads that contained neither ϕ X (+)-strand nor F1b (beads only; lanes 7 and 8) were incubated with hRad51 and then mixed with ϕ X duplex. As an additional control, ϕ X duplex DNA was incubated with beads containing the ϕ X (+)-strand-F1b hybrid without hRad51 (ϕ X/F1b, No hRad51; lanes 9 and 10). The supernatants (S) and the SDS eluates (E) from the reactions were analyzed in an agarose gel for their content of duplex DNA. *B*, salt weakens interaction of duplex with the hRad51-ssDNA filament. Duplex ϕ X DNA was incubated with the hRad51 filament assembled on the immobilized ϕ X (+)-strand with increasing concentrations of ammonium sulfate. The supernatants (S) and SDS eluates (E) from the binding reactions were analyzed for their contents of DNA duplex (upper panel) and hRad51 (lower panel). *C*, the results in *B* are graphed (●), as are results from binding reactions in which potassium acetate was used (○). *D*, effect of order of addition of ammonium sulfate. Duplex DNA was added to binding reactions 3 min before or immediately after the incorporation of increasing levels of ammonium sulfate (*panel I*). The results with adding ammonium sulfate before (shaded bar) and after (dark bar) the incorporation of duplex are presented in the histogram in *panel II*.

substrates have been instrumental for formulating biochemical models for understanding the functions of various RAD52 group proteins. For instance, in addition to the well documented stimulatory role of yRPA in yRad51-mediated DNA strand exchange, experiments which varied the order of addition of reaction components have revealed that yRPA, if added with or before yRad51 to the ssDNA substrate, can also compete with yRad51 for binding sites on the ssDNA and consequently suppress the assembly of yRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament (2). The yeast RAD52 encoded product and the heterodimeric molecule of yRad55 and yRad57 proteins, referred to as recombination mediators, promote the assembly of the yRad51-ssDNA filament and help overcome the suppression of DNA strand exchange caused by coaddition of yRPA with

yRad51 to the ssDNA substrate or by preincubation of ssDNA with yRPA (2, 18).

We have verified that preincubation of ssDNA with hRad51 before the incorporation of hRPA is in fact critical for homologous pairing and strand exchange efficiency,² providing evidence that hRPA competes with hRad51 for binding sites on ssDNA. This observation suggests the existence of specific mediators in the human recombination machinery for promoting hRad51-ssDNA filament assembly when there is the need for hRad51 to compete with other single-strand binding factors for sites on the initiating ssDNA substrate. A possible mediator

² S. Sigurdsson and P. Sung, unpublished observations.

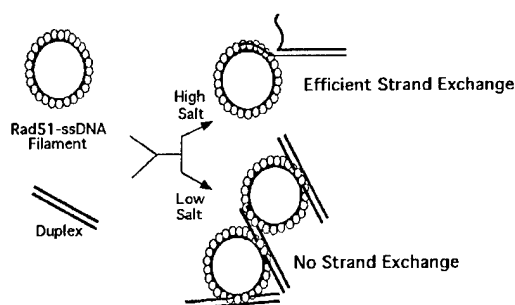


FIG. 8. Model for hRad51-mediated DNA strand exchange. The results suggest that duplex DNA molecules stably bound to the hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament present a strong impediment to the different reaction steps, including DNA homology search, DNA pairing, and branch migration of the nascent DNA joint, that lead to successful recombination between the DNA substrates. Efficient DNA pairing and strand exchange is realized by lessening the duplex/hRad51-ssDNA interactions, achieved by the inclusion of salt.

function may exist in various human recombination factors including hRad52 and a number of Rad55/Rad57-like proteins, namely XRCC2, XRCC3, Rad51B, Rad51C, and Rad51D, which are all known to be involved in recombination and either directly, or through another recombination factor, physically interact with hRad51 (3, 19). Furthermore, it remains a distinct possibility that some of these other recombination factors are in fact integral components of the presynaptic filament, and as such, may modulate the dynamics of the presynaptic filament to facilitate sampling of duplex DNA for homology and to promote the formation of DNA joints once homology is located. The *in vitro* DNA strand exchange system with the defined biochemical parameters described herein should be well suited for examining the function of various recombination factors and the role of post-translational modifications of these recombina-

tion factors in the DNA strand exchange reaction.

Recently, hRad51 was shown to interact with the breast tumor suppressor BRCA2 (12). In the Capan-1 cell line defective in BRCA2 function, the DNA damage-induced formation of hRad51 nuclear foci is defective, suggesting the possibility that BRCA2 helps deliver hRad51 to the DNA substrate (12). Whether or not BRCA2 functions as a mediator to promote hRad51 nucleoprotein filament assembly can be tested with the *in vitro* DNA strand exchange system described herein.

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Review

Recombination factors of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*Patrick Sung^{*}, Kelly Miguel Trujillo, Stephen Van Komen

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Abstract

The budding yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* has been an excellent genetic and biochemical model for our understanding of homologous recombination. Central to the process of homologous recombination are the products of the *RAD52* epistasis group of genes, whose functions we now know include the nucleolytic processing of DNA double-strand breaks, the ability to conduct a DNA homology search, and the capacity to promote the exchange of genetic information between homologous regions on recombining chromosomes. It is also clear that the basic functions of the *RAD52* group of genes have been highly conserved among eukaryotes. Disruption of this important process causes genomic instability, which can result in a number of unsavory consequences, including tumorigenesis and cell death. © 2000 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Prologue

In addition to creating genetic diversity, homologous recombination is also an important tool for repairing DNA double-strand breaks (DSBs). Furthermore, meiotic recombination helps establish stable interactions between chromosomal homologs, and as such, is indispensable for the proper disjunction of chromosomes in the first meiotic division (reviewed in Refs. [47,71,82]).

Much of our understanding of homologous recombination processes in eukaryotes has originated from studies conducted in the budding yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*. The common denominator of many recombination processes in *S. cerevisiae* (henceforth referred to as yeast) is a DNA DSB,

formed either as a result of exposure of cells to break-inducing radiation and chemicals or as part of developmental programs. The most notable examples of the latter class of recombination processes are mating type switching, being initiated by a site-specific DSB made by the HO endonuclease, and meiotic recombination, which occurs by way of DSBs introduced by a complex of proteins including Spo11 as the catalytic subunit. Once a DSB is formed, the ends of the break are subjected to processing by exonucleolytic activities and the single-stranded DNA tails thus formed will be channeled into one of a number of homologous recombination pathways as discussed below and elsewhere [66]. Alternatively, the DNA ends can simply be rejoined via the non-homologous DNA end-joining pathway, with or without further processing. A synopsis of the major homologous recombination pathways and their genetic and biochemical requirements is given below. Comprehensive reviews on non-homologous DNA

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end-joining have been published recently [32,107], and this topic will not be dealt with here.

2. Recombination processes

2.1. Classical recombination

In classical recombination, the DSB is processed by an exonuclease activity, digesting away a substantial portion of the DNA strands that contain the 5' ends of the break. This end-processing reaction results in long (as long as 1 kb or more) ssDNA tails that have a 3' extremity. These ssDNA tails are utilized for the nucleation of a number of recombination factors to yield a nucleoprotein complex that has the ability to conduct a DNA homology search to locate an intact DNA homolog, which could be either the sister chromatid or the homologous chromosome. Invasion of the homolog in a reaction called "homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange" yields a joint between the recombining molecules (Fig. 1). When the recombining DNA molecules encompass different alleles of the same gene, then DNA mismatches will form in the DNA joint, giving rise to heteroduplex DNA. Correction of the DNA mismatches results in the conversion of one of the recombining alleles to the other. Heteroduplex DNA formation followed by DNA mismatch correction represents an important means for gene conversion in yeast, although it is not the only route. In considering this well recognized DNA DSB repair model for homologous recombination (variants of this model have been discussed by Paques and Haber [66]), one important point to bear in mind is that the 3' ssDNA tails arising through DSB end-processing, rather than the DSB per se, are in fact the substrate utilized by the recombination machinery for mediating subsequent reactions.

While meiotic recombination mainly involves chromosomal homologs, it is believed that most of the recombination events during mitotic growth occur in the late S and G2 phases and involve the sister chromatids. However, in yeast, there is considerable capacity to carry out allelic (interchromosomal) recombination during mitotic growth, and allelic recombination appears to have a somewhat different genetic requirement than sister chromatid-based recombination ([66]; see later). Mutations in genes

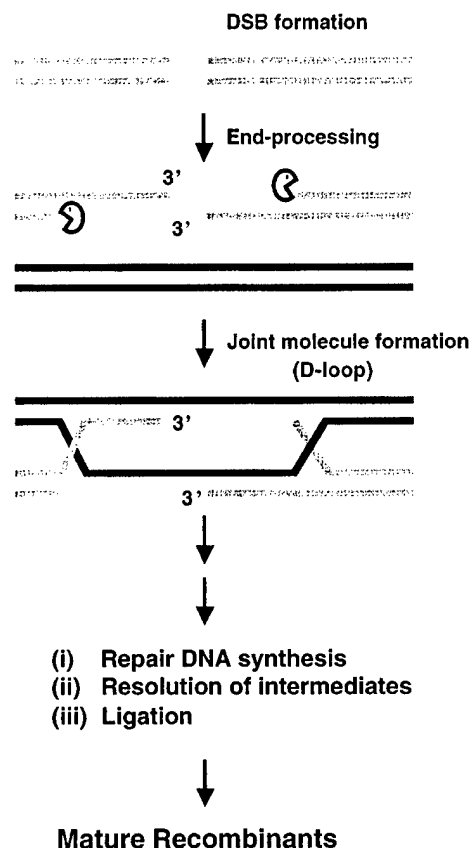


Fig. 1. Recombination induced by DNA DSBs. The ends of DNA DSBs are processed nucleolytically to yield long 3' single-strand tails. Nucleation of recombination factors onto the single-strand tails leads to a search for a DNA homolog and pairing with the homolog to form a joint molecule called D-loop. Concurrent and subsequent steps include DNA synthesis to replace the genetic information eliminated during end-processing, resolution of the Holliday intermediates, and DNA ligation to complete the recombination process.

(e.g., *RAD50*, *MRE11*, and *XRS2*) that are believed to mediate sister chromatid-based recombination could in fact lead to higher levels of recombination between homologs. It has been suggested that when sister chromatid-based recombination is inactivated, the recombinogenic DNA substrates are channeled more often into interchromosomal recombination pathways.

2.1.1. The players in classical homologous recombination: *RAD52* epistasis group

Genetic screens based mainly on sensitivity to ionizing radiation have identified a large number of genetic loci required for the repair of DNA breaks,

and many of these genes have subsequently been shown to be needed for efficient mating type switching, mitotic recombination, and meiotic recombination. These genes — *RAD50*, *RAD51*, *RAD52*, *RAD54*, *RAD55*, *RAD57*, *RAD59*, *RDH54/TID1*, *MRE11*, and *XRS2* — are collectively known as the *RAD52* epistasis group [6,29,48,66,71,90]. Below, we provide a synopsis of the biochemistry of the products of these genes and their likely roles in enzymatic reactions that lead to the formation of recombinants.

2.1.1.1. Biochemistry of homologous recombination DNA end-processing

Role of Rad50, Mre11, and Xrs2 in end-processing. A good body of evidence has linked *RAD50*, *MRE11*, and *XRS2* to DSB end-processing during recombination processes [66]. Rad50 is a highly conserved member of the Structural Maintenance of Chromosomes (SMC) family of proteins, which functions in different aspects of chromosomal metabolism (reviewed in Ref. [35]). Mre11 is also a highly conserved protein and shows homology to phosphodiesterases. Rad50 and Mre11 are the respective homologs of *Escherichia coli* SbcC and SbcD [84], which combine to form a complex that has ssDNA endonuclease and ATP-dependent exonuclease activities, and also an ability to open DNA hairpins; SbcD is the catalytic subunit of this nuclease complex [20]. Consistent with these observations, Mre11 from both yeast [28,60,108] and humans [69,106] exhibits ssDNA endonuclease activity, a 3' to 5' exonuclease activity, and hMre11 also possesses an ability to cleave DNA hairpins [69,70]; whether yMre11 acts on DNA hairpins remains to be determined. hMre11 combines with hRad50, and the resulting complex has enhanced exonuclease activity [69]. The exonuclease activity of hRad50–hMre11 complex is not stimulated by ATP, thus marking a major difference between this human complex and the bacterial SbcC–SbcD complex. Mre11 from both yeast and humans, like its bacterial counterpart SbcD, specifically requires manganese for the activation of its nuclease activity.

The human Rad50–Mre11 complex combines, primarily or exclusively through Mre11 [70], with a third protein called p95 [22]. Recently, p95 was found to be mutated in the cancer prone disease

Nijmegen breakage syndrome (NBS), and is now also called NBS1 or nibrin [16,110]. NBS1/nibrin modulates the nuclease function of the Rad50–Mre11 complex, making it possible for the complex containing the protein trio to act efficiently on different types of DNA hairpins and also endonucleolytically and in an ATP-dependent manner, on 3' ssDNA tails that border a duplex region. The Rad50–Mre11–NBS1 complex has a modest ability to unwind duplex DNA, resulting in DNA strand separation. DNA unwinding is stimulated by ATP, and mutating the nucleotide binding fold in Rad50 renders the mutant Rad50 containing protein complex insensitive to ATP in DNA unwinding and nuclease functions [70]. NBS cells, like ataxia telangiectasia (AT) cells, appear to be defective in different cell cycle checkpoints. Based on this phenotype of NBS cells, it has been proposed that NBS1 relays the detection of DNA lesions to the cell cycle checkpoint machinery (reviewed in Ref. [88]). However, the results of Paull and Gellert [70] have clearly demonstrated that NBS1 is in fact also important for the expression of the full repertoire of biochemical activities of the Mre11-associated complex.

In yeast, Xrs2 combines with the Rad50–Mre11 complex through the Mre11 subunit [43,108]. Although Xrs2 is considered the yeast equivalent of NBS1, Xrs2 is only distantly related to NBS1 in amino acid sequence, with homology noted only in the amino-termini of the two factors where putative protein–protein interaction domains are located (reviewed in Ref. [27]). There is no information available as to the biochemical functions of Xrs2 and its role in modulating the activities of Rad50 and Mre11.

Possible means for processing DNA ends. Studies in yeast have clearly indicated that the ends of DNA DSBs are processed to yield 3' ssDNA tails (Fig. 1), predicting a 5' to 3' exonuclease activity in the end-processing reaction. It was therefore rather surprising to find that hMre11 and yMre11 both have a 3' to 5' exonuclease activity but are apparently devoid of a significant 5' to 3' exonuclease activity [28,60,69,106,108]. To reconcile this paradox, it has been suggested that the Mre11-associated complex functionally cooperates with a DNA helicase to unwind DNA from the ends, creating an open structure for the endonucleolytic function of Mre11 to act on (Fig. 2). Since a short single-stranded region may be

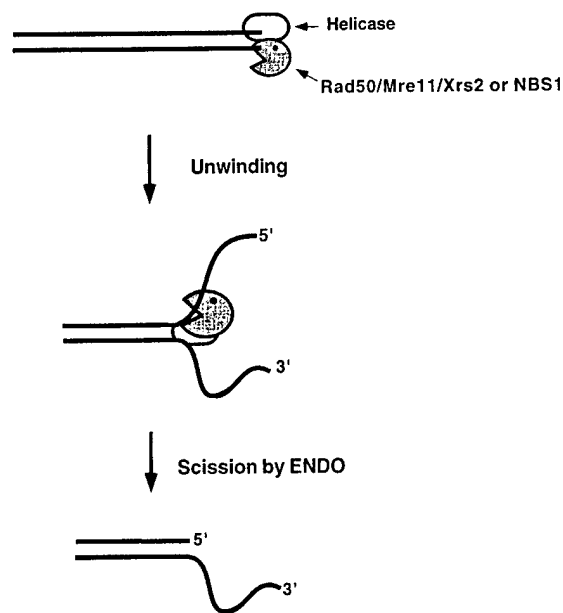


Fig. 2. Possible mechanism for DSB end-processing. It is postulated that a higher order complex of a DNA helicase and the trio of Rad50, Mre11, and Xrs2 is recruited to the DNA ends. DNA strand separation by the helicase then creates a splayed DNA structure, the 5' overhang of which is then excised by the endonucleolytic activity of Mre11 to generate the 3' ssDNA tail observed in genetic experiments.

required for the loading of a DNA helicase and activation of DNA unwinding, it seems possible that the 3' to 5' exonuclease activity of Mre11 may, at least under some circumstances, be involved in generating a short 5' ssDNA overhang for the loading and activation of the DNA helicase.

Genetic results have clearly indicated that Mre11 is not the only nuclease capable of processing DNA ends during mitotic recombination, and that the Mre11 complex must play another role in recombination [66]. Since the sister chromatid appears to be the preferred DNA homolog used in directing recombinational repair, one plausible idea is that Mre11 together with Rad50 and Xrs2 mediate the type of sister–sister chromatid interactions indispensable for the efficient repair of lesions by sister chromatid-based recombination ([66]; John Petrini, personal communication).

Unlike the situation in mitotic cells, the processing of DNA DSBs during meiotic recombination is largely or completely dependent on the Mre11-associated nuclease activity. As discussed elsewhere

[10,49], a putative topoisomerase activity in Spo11 is likely to be responsible for the generation of meiosis-specific DSBs, and Spo11 has been shown to remain covalently attached to the 5' termini of the DNA breaks [49]. Thus, it appears that only the Mre11-associated protein complex is capable of removing Spo11 covalently attached to the 5' termini of the meiosis-specific DSBs.

Multifunctional nature of Rad50, Mre11, and Xrs2. Genetic analyses have revealed that Rad50, Mre11, and Xrs2 work in conjunction with Spo11 to introduce meiosis specific DNA DSBs. Truly remarkable are the observations that the trio of Rad50, Mre11, and Xrs2 are also required for the maintenance of telomere length and for non-homologous DNA end joining. Notably, the Mre11 nuclease activity appears to be dispensable for its functions in meiotic DSB formation, telomere maintenance, and DNA end-joining. The readers can find more information on these topics in recent reviews [32,66,107].

Heteroduplex DNA formation

Roles of Rad51, Rad52, Rad54, Rad55, Rad57, Rdh54 / Tid1, and RPA in heteroduplex DNA formation. Genetic and biochemical studies have revealed a role for Rad51, Rad52, Rad54, Rad55, Rad57, Rdh54, and RPA in the utilization of recombinogenic ssDNA substrates for the formation of heteroduplex DNA (reviewed in Ref. [66]). Here, we will describe in some detail the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction that is responsible for the generation of heteroduplex DNA, and will summarize the current state of knowledge of the biochemical functions of these recombination factors. The properties and salient features of the various recombination factors are also given in Table 1.

Rad51 recombinase. The *RAD51* encoded product is homologous to the *E. coli* general recombinase RecA [2,9,89], most notably in the regions of the latter that are concerned with catalytic functions, including the motifs involved in DNA binding and in nucleotide binding and hydrolysis [11,81]. Genetic studies have clearly implicated *RAD51* in recombination processes, and *rad51* mutants exhibit the type of phenotypes expected for eukaryotic homolog of RecA [2,9,89]. Direct evidence supporting the notion that Rad51 is a true functional RecA homolog has come from biochemical studies which demonstrated that (i) in the presence of ATP, Rad51 assem-

Table 1
The recombination factors of yeast

Protein	Size	Biochemical function	<i>E. coli</i> homolog	Human homolog	Notable features
Rad50	152,545	DNA-binding	SbcC	hRad50	Member of SMC family; forms complex with Mre11 and Xrs2
Mre11	77,630	ssDNA endonuclease 3' to 5' exonuclease	SbcD	hMre11	Homology to phosphodiesterases; forms complex with Rad50 and Xrs2
Xrs2	96,366	not known	none	NBS1	Forms complex with Rad50 and Mre11
Rad51	42,943	ATP-dependent homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange	RecA	hRad51	Forms nucleoprotein filaments; forms complexes with Rad52 and Rad54
Rad52	56,064	ssDNA binding and annealing	none	hRad52	Mediator of strand exchange; required for single strand annealing and BIR
Rad54	101,776	DNA-dependent ATPase	none	hRad54	Member of Snf2 family; promotes homologous DNA pairing by Rad51
Rad55	46,347	ssDNA binding	none	XRCC2, XRCC3, Rad51B, Rad51C, Rad51D	Forms heterodimer with Rad57; Rad55–Rad57 heterodimer functions as mediator in strand exchange
Rad57	52,242	ssDNA binding	none	XRCC2, XRCC3, Rad51B, Rad51C, Rad51D	Forms heterodimer with Rad55; Rad55–Rad57 heterodimer functions as mediator in strand exchange
Rad59	26,632	ssDNA binding and annealing	none	not known	Homology to Rad52; required for single strand annealing
Dmc1	36,606	ATP-dependent homologous DNA pairing ^a	RecA	hDmc1	Interacts with Rdh54/ Tid1 in two-hybrid system
Rdh54/Tid1	108,058	not known	none	hRad54	Member of Snf2 family; interacts with Dmc1 and Rad51 in two-hybrid system
RPA	70,339	ssDNA binding	none	hRPA	Removes secondary structure in ssDNA during the presynaptic phase of strand exchange
	29,921				
	13,810				

^aBased on results with hDmc1 [52].

bles into a nucleoprotein filament on both ssDNA and dsDNA that is almost identical to the equivalent RecA-DNA nucleoprotein filament in overall dimensions and structure [65,98] and (ii) like RecA, Rad51 exhibits a homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange activity that yields joints between two DNA molecules [97].

Outside of the central homologous core of about 220 amino acids, RecA and Rad51 actually differ significantly, with Rad51 bearing an amino-terminal extension of about 120 amino acids, but is shorter

than RecA by about 90 amino acids at the carboxyl-terminus. In addition, yeast Rad51 has a putative leucine zipper motif (L-X₆-L-X₆-L-X₆-F) from residues 296–317. These structural distinctions between RecA and Rad51 could account for the functional differences between the two proteins and could perhaps also reflect the unique sets of evolutionarily divergent recombination factors with which the two recombinases have to interact to accomplish their biological roles. Like RecA, Rad51 has a DNA-dependent ATPase activity. Maximal ATP hydrolysis

by Rad51 is seen with ssDNA, with duplex DNA being 5–10-fold less effective in activating ATP hydrolysis [97]. The k_{cat} for ATP hydrolysis with ssDNA as cofactor is less than 1/min, which is about 40-fold lower than what has been observed for RecA [95,97].

Homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange mediated by Rad51. The homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction has been studied in vitro using a variety of available systems, some of which are described in Fig. 3. The common feature of all of these in vitro systems is that there is a single DNA strand, which is the equivalent of the 3' ssDNA tail generated via DNA end-processing in vivo, and a homologous duplex DNA molecule that is either linear or covalently closed, which can be considered the prospective DNA homolog, i.e. the homologous chromosome or sister chromatid. The reaction is initiated via the assembly a Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein complex, into which the homologous duplex DNA molecule is incorporated for DNA homology search and DNA joint formation with the single strand.

The reaction phase in which assembly of the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein complex occurs is called the “presynaptic” phase, a process that is simple conceptually but in reality surprisingly complex, being dependent on the single-strand DNA binding factor RPA and molecular “mediators”, as described in more detail below. Later, reaction steps which collectively lead to stable pairing between the recombining DNA molecules occur in the “synaptic” phase, which is also described in some detail below. Once a stable joint is formed between the two recombining DNA molecules, branch migration extends the length of the joint, resulting in formation of a substantial amount of heteroduplex DNA (see below).

Distinct phases of the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction

The presynaptic phase. In the presence of ATP, Rad51 polymerizes onto ssDNA [98] and dsDNA [65] to form helical nucleoprotein filaments that are right-handed [65]. Formation of the Rad51 filament on ssDNA is stimulated by the heterotrimeric ssDNA binding factor RPA [98], whereas Rad51 filament

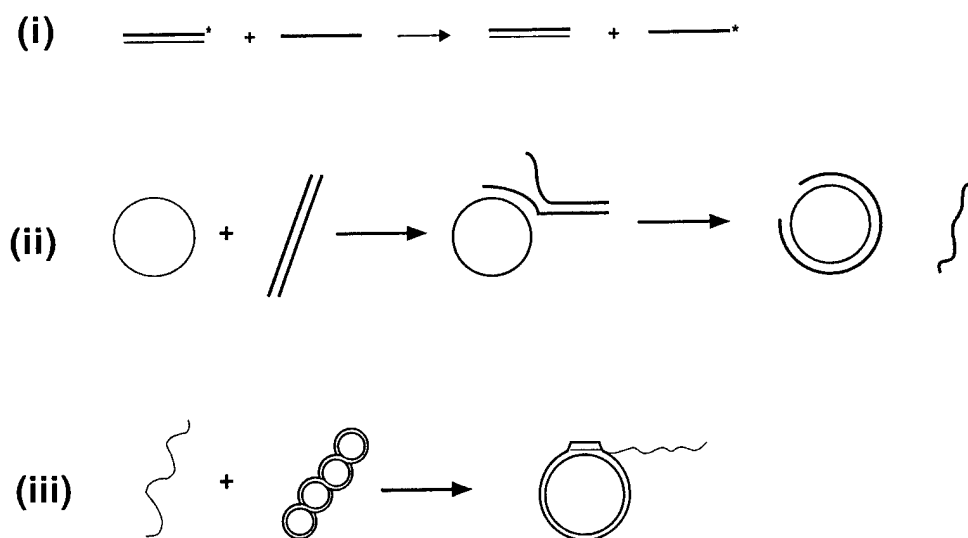


Fig. 3. Systems for studying the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction. (i) This prototypical system that uses oligonucleotides is quite sensitive, and it allows one the option of examining the influence of DNA sequence context on homologous DNA pairing. Because of the short length of the substrates, this system is not very useful for studying the strand exchange or branch migration reaction. (ii) This system employs the viral (+) strand and linear duplex form of DNA from a bacteriophage, and is used frequently for examining homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange by RecA and Rad51. (iii) To measure D-loop formation, one employs a linear single strand and a covalently closed duplex, normally a supercoiled molecule. The D-loop is the first DNA intermediate formed in vivo, and studies with yeast proteins have indicated that formation of D-loop requires Rad54, in addition to Rad51 and RPA (Petukhova et al., 1998). The readers can find more information on in vitro homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange systems in other review articles [50,81]. Portions of this figure were adapted from Camerini-Otero and Hsieh [15].

assembly on dsDNA shows no dependence on RPA [65,98]. The formation of Rad51 filament on either ssDNA or dsDNA requires ATP [65,98], although ATP binding alone appears to be sufficient for assembly [99]. The Rad51 nucleoprotein filament on circular dsDNA has been analyzed by three-dimensional reconstruction [65], and the results indicate that the Rad51 filament is almost identical in overall dimensions and appearance to the equivalent filament of RecA, with a pitch of 99 Å and 18.6 base pairs of DNA per helical turn. The most notable feature about the Rad51-dsDNA filament is that the DNA is held in a highly extended conformation, as reflected in the axial rise of 5.1 Å per base pair as compared to 3.4 Å per base pair encountered in normal B-form DNA [65]. The Rad51 filament formed on ssDNA has not been analyzed in as much detail, but it also shows the same extended conformation and shares similar overall dimensions as the Rad51-dsDNA filament [98].

Biochemical analyses have indicated that the homologous DNA pairing and strand exchange reaction occurs within the confines of the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament, whereas the Rad51 filament on dsDNA is not capable of mediating this reaction [98]. The extent of Rad51 filament assembly on ssDNA can be followed by electron microscopy, but much more conveniently by simply measuring the level of ssDNA dependent ATPase activity [95]. Although RPA is important for the assembly of a contiguous filament on ssDNA and is therefore an important cofactor in the strand exchange reaction [95,97], an excess of RPA can in fact suppress this reaction [100]. This inhibitory effect of RPA has been attributed to competition with Rad51 for binding sites on the ssDNA. Two factors, Rad52 and Rad55–Rad57, help Rad51 overcome the competition posed by RPA, as described below.

The synaptic phase. Once the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament is assembled, it is capable of taking up another DNA molecule, which could be a single-strand or a duplex. In this regard, the ssDNA molecule onto which the Rad51 filament has assembled may be viewed as being bound within a primary site within the filament, and the incoming homologous duplex molecule bound within a secondary site in the filament [50,81]. For stable pairing between the ssDNA and the duplex to occur, homologous

contacts need to be established between the two recombining DNA molecules within the nucleoprotein filament. By reason of probability, the initial contact points between the ssDNA and the duplex are not at homologous locales. Exactly how the Rad51 nucleoprotein filament samples the incoming duplex to locate DNA homology is not known at this juncture. In the case of the RecA filament, it is believed that DNA homology search is relatively rapid and involves random collisions of the two DNA molecules [50,81]. In theory, binding of the duplex to the secondary site in the RecA filament has to be transient for a random collision mechanism to work efficiently. In support of this deduction, Mazin and Kowalczykowski [58] have provided evidence that the secondary binding site in the RecA filament indeed has only modest affinity for a duplex molecule. Experimental evidence does not support extensive sliding between the two DNA molecules within the RecA filament as a major means for locating DNA homology [3]. Given the precedent with RecA, it seems reasonable to propose that DNA homology search conducted by the Rad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament may primarily go through the random collision mode as well.

Once DNA homology is found, alignment of the two recombining molecules is established through a series of transient joints called paranemic joints (Fig. 4A). In RecA studies, the exact nature of the paranemic joint is still a subject of debate. Some have argued that the paranemic linkage involves a DNA triplex structure (i.e. all three strands are held together via novel non-Watson–Crick bonding), whereas other investigators believe that DNA strand switch occurs in the paranemic joint, with the extent of the strand switch being limited by topological constraints and dependent on the local nucleotide sequence context. Regardless of the true nature of the paranemic joint, it has been demonstrated in a number of studies, and although the paranemic joints dissociate readily when the RecA filament is disrupted (by deproteinization treatment, for instance), they are believed to be an important DNA intermediate that serves to capture the duplex and bring the two recombining DNA molecules into homologous registry [50,78,81].

When the two recombining DNA molecules are aligned, then there is the potential for the formation

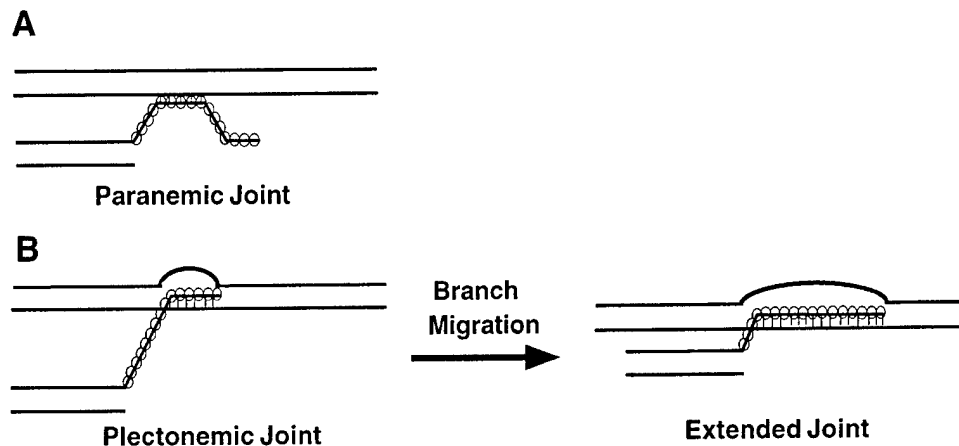


Fig. 4. DNA joints in the formation of heteroduplex DNA. (A) The first homologous joints formed between the recombining DNA molecules are paranemic. The paranemic joints are unstable but are believed to be important intermediates which lead to the formation of a stable joint molecule. The exact nature of the paranemic joint remains a subject of debate (see text and Roca and Cox [81]). (B) Once a free DNA end is located, the formation of a stable plectonemic linkage ensues. The reaction in which the plectonemic joint is extended is called branch migration or strand exchange. The circles in (A) and (B) denote Rad51 molecules. It should be noted that the nucleoprotein complex that conducts the reaction steps very likely contains other factors of the *RAD52* group, including Rad52, Rad54, and Rad55–Rad57 (see text).

of a stable joint molecule. This occurs when a free DNA end is present either in the ssDNA or the dsDNA molecule to allow for intertwining of the ssDNA strand with the complementary strand in the duplex partner. The plectonemic joint that results is much more stable than the paranemic linkage, because the two DNA molecules in the plectonemic joint are not only base-paired but are also topologically linked. In the branch migration reaction, the length of the plectonemic joint is extended (Fig. 4B). In the case of the Rad51 filament, branch migration proceeds 3' to 5' with respect to the initiating single strand, a reaction polarity opposite to that of RecA [98]. However, other results have suggested that branch migration within the Rad51 filament can also proceed in the 5' to 3' direction [63]. It is clear that branch migration mediated by the Rad51 filament does not need ATP hydrolysis [99], although based on the RecA model, one suspects that ATP hydrolysis could increase the bias for branch migration in a certain direction [81].

Recombination factors that function in the presynaptic phase

RPA. As alluded to above, the heterotrimeric ssDNA binding factor RPA is required for the efficient assembly of the Rad51 presynaptic filament, as veri-

fied by electron microscopy [98] and by examining the level of Rad51 ssDNA-dependent ATPase activity [95]. *E. coli* single-strand DNA binding protein (SSB) is as effective as yeast RPA in stimulating the ssDNA dependent ATPase and the DNA strand exchange activities of Rad51. Since Rad51 and SSB are not expected to interact physically, the results suggest that the major functional role of RPA in presynapsis is to remove the secondary structure in the ssDNA substrate [95]. This conclusion is directly supported by the observation that homopolymeric DNA species which are devoid of secondary structure are significantly more effective than natural ssDNA species in activating ATP hydrolysis by Rad51 [95].

In Rad51-mediated strand exchange, the stimulatory effect of RPA is seen most clearly when it is incorporated into the reaction after Rad51 has already nucleated onto the ssDNA. If an excess of RPA is added before or with Rad51 to the ssDNA substrate, suppression of strand exchange ensues [100]. RPA inhibits the ssDNA-dependent ATPase activity of Rad51 under conditions where it suppresses strand exchange [91,95]. Taken together, the results indicate that RPA can interfere with the assembly process by competing for binding sites on the

ssDNA substrate. Since RPA is at least as abundant as Rad51 in yeast cells, it seems likely that specific ancillary factors function with Rad51 *in vivo* to overcome the competition posed by RPA. Indeed, Rad52 and the Rad55–Rad57 complex have been shown to facilitate the assembly of the Rad51–ssDNA nucleoprotein filament when RPA is competing for DNA binding sites, as described in greater detail below.

Rad52, a mediator in strand exchange. *RAD52* encoded product does not show obvious homology to any of the known recombination proteins in bacteria, and therefore appears to be unique to eukaryotes. Rad52 from yeast and humans binds to DNA as a ring-shaped multimer [92,109], showing higher affinity for ssDNA than dsDNA [61,92]. Recently, Van Dyck et al. [109] reported that human Rad52 binds specifically to DNA-ends.

Rad52 is of lower cellular abundance than Rad51, and forms a stable, stoichiometric, and co-immunoprecipitable complex with Rad51 [101]. Rad51–Rad52 complex has a mean size of greater than 1 MDa in gel filtration and its formation is not influenced by ATP (B.W. Song and P. Sung, unpublished results). Although Rad52 has been reported to interact with RPA in solution [92] and when RPA is bound to DNA [96], a stable complex between RPA and Rad52 cannot be demonstrated in cell extract or when purified Rad52 and RPA are mixed (B.W. Song and P. Sung, unpublished results). As described earlier, an excess of RPA added with Rad51 to the ssDNA substrate suppresses nucleoprotein filament assembly and compromises strand exchange efficiency. Under this circumstance, addition of Rad52 effectively overcomes the inhibition posed by RPA [64,92,100], and an amount of Rad52 approximately one tenth of Rad51 is already optimal for restoring strand exchange [101]. Although Rad52 is a ssDNA binding protein, it does not replace RPA in the strand exchange reaction [64,91,101]. Thus, Rad52 plays a highly specific role in the homologous pairing and strand exchange reaction, mediating a productive interaction between the recombinase Rad51 and the ssDNA binding factor RPA [101]. Because of this function of Rad52, it has been coined a “mediator” of DNA strand exchange [45,100]. How Rad52 exerts its mediator function is not known at present, but it seems reasonable to propose that

Rad52 targets Rad51 to ssDNA, which can then act as the nucleation sites for filament growth.

Genetic studies have indicated that Rad52 also functions in at least two other pathways of recombination, namely, single-strand annealing (SSA) and DNA break induced replication (BIR), which are discussed in more detail below. The involvement of *RAD52* in multiple recombination pathways could be the reason why it appears to be the most important recombination factor in mitotic cells. Thus, although null mutations in *RAD52* essentially eliminate all the cellular ability to carry out recombination, it could be due to the cumulated effects of defects in different recombination pathways and does not necessarily mean that a certain recombination mechanism is more dependent on Rad52 than on other members of the *RAD52* group. Interestingly, the *RAD52* homolog in vertebrates does not appear to be nearly as indispensable in recombination and repair [80,112], suggesting that either Rad52 is not involved in as many different recombination pathways in higher organisms, or another recombination factor, a Rad52-homologous protein perhaps, provides parallel functions in other eukaryotes.

Rad55–Rad57 complex, and its mediator function. *RAD55* and *RAD57* genes are unique among the *RAD52* group members in that their mutants, including null mutants, are cold sensitive for recombination and for sensitivity to ionizing radiation [55]. The recombination defects in the *rad55 rad57* double mutant are no more severe than those in single mutants, indicating a tight epistatic relationship between the two genes. Interestingly, Rad55 and Rad57 share some limited homology to RecA and Rad51, particularly in the sequence motifs involved in the binding of nucleoside triphosphates [54], and have in fact been referred to as RecA homologs. Rad55 and Rad57 interact in the yeast two-hybrid system [34,41]. In agreement with the two-hybrid results, Rad55 and Rad57 coimmunoprecipitate from cell extract and co-purify chromatographically. Sizing experiments revealed that the majority of Rad55–Rad57 is heterodimeric [101]. Interestingly, although Rad51 was shown to interact strongly with Rad55 in the yeast two-hybrid assay [34,41], Rad55–Rad57 complex does not co-immunoprecipitate with Rad51 from cell extract and purified Rad55–Rad57 heterodimer binds only weakly to Rad51 immobilized on Affi-gel beads

[100]. Mutations in the Walker type A nucleotide binding motif of Rad55 interfere with its recombination functions, whereas the equivalent mutations in Rad57 have little or no effect [41].

Addition of Rad55–Rad57 complex to the strand exchange reaction also effectively overcomes the competition posed by RPA, indicative of a mediator function of the heterodimer [101]. Like Rad52, the Rad55–Rad57 heterodimer is of lower cellular abundance than Rad51, and amounts of Rad55–Rad57 substoichiometric to that of Rad51 are already sufficient to effect the optimal level of mediator function. Although Rad55–Rad57 heterodimer has a ssDNA binding activity, it does not replace RPA in strand exchange and does not appear to possess strand exchange activity [101].

Since a mediator function has been identified in Rad52 as well [64,91,100], it is possible that Rad55–Rad57 heterodimer acts via a different mechanism or assists Rad51 at a stage in the assembly of the presynaptic filament temporally distinct from the reaction step that is dependent on Rad52. Alternatively, or in addition, Rad52 and Rad55–Rad57 complex may provide parallel, overlapping functions to ensure that the assembly of the Rad51 nucleoprotein filament occurs efficiently in vivo.

Recombination factors that function in the synaptic phase

Rad54. The *RAD54* encoded product belongs to the Swi2/Snf2 protein family, members of which are involved in diverse chromosomal processes including transcription, nucleotide excision repair, and post-replicative repair (reviewed in Ref. [25]). Consistent with the presence of Walker type nucleotide binding motifs in Rad54 [26], purified Rad54 has a robust ATPase activity ($k_{cat} \sim 1000 \text{ min}^{-1}$) that is completely dependent on DNA, dsDNA in particular, for its activation. However, Rad54 does not possess a DNA helicase activity [72a]. Rad54 is a monomer in solution, but in the presence of DNA assembles into higher order species, as revealed by protein cross-linking [72]. Rad54 is of lower cellular abundance than Rad51 [40] and physically interacts with Rad51 [19,40,72a]. The addition of Rad54 to a homologous DNA pairing reaction consisting of circular ssDNA and linear duplex (systems (i) and (ii) in Fig. 3) results in strong stimulation of the homologous pairing rate [72a]. The first DNA intermediate

predicted in the DNA DSB repair model for recombination is a D-loop structure formed between the initiating ssDNA tail and the DNA homolog (see Fig. 1). While Rad51 is incapable of mediating D-loop formation in vitro (system (iii) in Fig. 3), the inclusion of Rad54 renders D-loop formation possible [72a]. Rad54 by itself does not have homologous DNA pairing activity, nor does it replace RPA in this reaction [72a].

Rad54 from both yeast and humans mediates an alteration in duplex DNA conformation that results in a DNA linking number change [72,102]. This reaction has a strict dependence on ATP hydrolysis, as indicated from biochemical studies using the non-hydrolyzable ATP analog ATP- γ -S and substitution of Rad54 with mutant variants (*hrad54* K189R, *yrad54* K341A, and *yrad54* K341R) that do not hydrolyze ATP [72,102]. Whether the DNA conformational change entails DNA strand separation is not known at this point. It seems reasonable to propose that the ability to alter DNA conformation in a manner that is dependent on ATP hydrolysis is a conserved property of Rad54, and that this property is germane for the recombination function of Rad54.

The *rad54* K341A and *rad54* K341R alleles, which harbor mutations in the highly conserved lysine residue in the Walker type A sequence, have been shown to encode mutant *rad54* proteins defective in ATP hydrolysis [72]. Clever et al. [19] found that whereas overexpression of wild type *RAD54* gene suppresses the ultraviolet and MMS sensitivities of a *rad51* Δ mutant, overexpression of the *rad54* K341R allele has no such effect. The *rad54* K341R allele in a *rad54* Δ background is also defective in the repair of DNA lesions induced by MMS, intrachromosomal gene conversion in haploid *rad54* Δ cells, and in meiosis. The *rad54* K341A mutant gene behaves like the *rad54* K341R allele phenotypically [72]. Taken together, it seems clear that the Rad54 ATPase function is indispensable for *RAD54* dosage-dependent suppression of the DNA repair defects of the *rad51* Δ mutation [19] and also for different types of mitotic and meiotic recombination [72].

The *rad54* null mutant is not as affected in diploid interchromosomal gene conversion as in haploid gene conversion [48]. One possible explanation is that the *RAD54* related gene *RDH54/TID1* (see

below) provides the ability to carry out most of the diploid interchromosomal gene conversions, with only a small fraction being effected through *RAD54* ([48]; see below). Interestingly, diploid mitotic gene conversion was not significantly decreased in the *rad54K341A* and *rad54K341R* mutants [72]. This result suggests that either *rad54K341A* and *rad54K341R* mutants could promote diploid mitotic gene conversion on their own, or Rad54, but not its ATPase activity, is required for the integrity of a higher order complex important for gene conversion in diploid cells [72]. Since many members of the Swi2/Snf2 family of proteins function to remodel chromatin, it is an open possibility that Rad54 also has a chromatin remodeling function.

Rdh54/Tid1. Based on computer search, a homolog of *S. cerevisiae RAD54*, *RDH54*, has been identified [48,90]. *RDH54* was independently isolated as a gene whose product interacts with the meiosis-specific Rad51 homolog Dmc1 in a yeast two-hybrid screen, and was named *TID1* [24]. Rdh54/Tid1 also interacts with Rad51 in the two-hybrid assay, albeit with a lower apparent affinity than with Dmc1 [24]. Rdh54 shows about 35% sequence identity to Rad54. Although the *rdh54Δ* mutation confers only slightly sensitivity to MMS in haploid cells, it greatly sensitizes the MMS sensitivity of a *rad54Δ* haploid strain. Likewise, the *rad54Δ rdh54Δ* double mutant is more impaired in meiosis than either single mutant alone [48,90]. Interestingly, diploid yeast strains harboring homozygous deletions of *RAD54* and *RDH54* are severely growth retarded, and this impairment can be overcome by simultaneously deleting *RAD51*, strongly suggesting that the growth deficiency stems from attempted, but incomplete recombination. A diploid strain harboring homozygous deletions of *RDH54* and *SRS2* is inviable, and the lethality is also overcome by simultaneously deleting *RAD51* [48].

Superficially, it might appear that Rdh54 is simply providing a recombination function redundant to that of Rad54 during mitotic growth. However, Klein [48] discovered that diploid *rdh54Δ* cells are much more defective in interchromosomal gene conversions than diploid *rad54Δ* cells, indicating a specialized function of Rdh54 in interchromosomal recombination. Whether this specificity stems from a unique ability of Rdh54 to interact with proteins required for

interchromosomal recombination, or because Rdh54 provides a specific enzymatic function during interchromosomal recombination, remains to be determined.

Given the structural similarity of Rdh54 to Rad54 and its involvement in recombination processes, it is a distinct possibility that Rdh54 also possesses biochemical functions similar to what have been reported for Rad54 [72,72a]) and affects heteroduplex DNA formation by a similar mechanism. The interaction of Rdh54 with Dmc1 and Rad51 could mean that Rdh54 functions with both recombinases to promote heteroduplex DNA formation. Whether Rdh54 has a chromatin remodeling function is an interesting possibility that needs to be tested.

Other recombination factors

Rad59. Bai and Symington [6] identified a mutant, called *rad59*, which lowers the level of intra-chromosomal recombination in a *rad51* mutant background. The *rad59* mutant exhibits sensitivity to γ -ray, which was used as the basis for cloning the *RAD59* gene. *RAD59* has a meiotic function, as indicated by a synergistic decline in sporulation efficiency when combining a leaky mutation in *RAD52*, *rad52 R70K*, with the *rad59Δ* mutation [7]. Interestingly, Rad59 shows homology to the amino-terminal region of Rad52, and overexpression of Rad52 suppresses the γ -sensitivity of the *rad59* mutant [6]. More recently, both the Symington group [7] and the Haber group (personal communication) have found that Rad59 is required for recombination by SSA. Rad59 has a ssDNA binding activity and, consistent with its involvement in SSA, mediates the annealing of complementary DNA strands in vitro [73]. Bai and Symington [6] have envisioned that Rad59 functions in the context of a complex with Rad51, Rad52, and other recombination factors to ensure that ssDNA substrates are channeled efficiently into recombination pathways, and that Rad52 together with Rad59 may have the ability to promote strand invasion [7]. These ideas need to be tested with purified proteins.

Dmc1. The yeast *DMC1* encoded product is homologous to RecA [13,94] and much more so to Rad51 [13]. *DMC1* gene is required for normal levels of meiotic recombination and is therefore important for chromosomal disjunction during meiosis I. The expression of *DMC1* is restricted to meiosis, and consistent with this expression pattern, a *dmc1Δ*

mutation produces no discernible mitotic phenotype [13]. From gene knockout experiments in mice, it is clear that the Dmc1 homolog in mammals also has important meiotic functions [75,113]. Human Dmc1 has been purified and shown by Li et al. [52] to possess homologous DNA pairing activity. Dmc1 forms octameric rings, which stack on DNA, but does not apparently form a helical nucleoprotein filament [57,67].

Cell biological tool for studying recombination. The use of cell biological techniques to study recombination in yeast is a relatively new and exciting development. Because of the availability of yeast mutants defective in various stages of recombination processes, their analyses are often revealing as to their effect on the assembly of recombination protein complexes. The patterns of nuclear redistribution of various recombination factors during meiosis and following DNA damaging treatment have been examined [12,30,56,108]. For instance, the assembly of meiotic nuclear foci of Rad51 has been shown to be dependent on *RAD52*, *RAD55*, *RAD57*, and on genes that control the formation of meiotic DSBs [30], results which very nicely corroborate mechanistic predictions based on genetic and biochemical analyses. Currently, the cell biological approach is as close as one can get to visualizing recombination processes in situ. This approach will continue to provide valuable information concerning the temporal sequence and genetic requirements for the assembly of higher order recombination protein complexes in vivo.

Repair DNA synthesis and resolution of recombination intermediates. Based on the observation that during conversion of the mating type information at *MAT*, the repair DNA synthesis step requires the concerted action of DNA polymerases α , δ , and ϵ , Holmes and Haber [37] have suggested that the repair synthesis reaction entails the establishment of both leading and lagging DNA strands. Whether the results of Holmes and Haber on mating type switching apply to other recombination processes and how the various DNA synthesis factors are recruited to sites of recombination are interesting subjects that need to be addressed.

Two genes, *MSH4* and *MSH5*, which encode proteins with considerable homology to the mismatch repair factors Msh2 and Msh3, are required

for wild type levels of crossover recombination during meiosis [36,83]. In the *msh4* and *msh5* mutants, the levels of meiotic gene conversion and post meiotic segregation appear to be normal at the majority of the loci examined, indicating no overt defect in mismatch repair in these mutants. Because of the deficiency in crossover recombination, *msh4* and *msh5* mutants exhibit a defect in chromosome disjunction during meiosis I, resulting in a sporulation deficit and low spore viability. The *MSH4* and *MSH5* genes are epistatic to each other in meiotic crossover recombination, consistent with the suggestion that their encoded products function in the same biological pathway or reaction [36], and also with the observation that the two proteins are associated as a stable complex [77]. Other results have indicated a role for the mismatch repair protein Mlh1 in the Msh4–Msh5 dependent pathway of meiotic crossover recombination [38]. Since Msh proteins have the ability to bind DNA mismatches and specific DNA structures [4], it is possible that Msh4–Msh5 complex in conjunction with Mlh1 may specifically recognize and stabilize a DNA intermediate, such as the Holliday junction, critical for the formation of crossover recombinants. Expression of *MSH4* and *MSH5* is restricted to meiosis, and in yeast strains mutated for these two genes, no mitotic phenotypes can be discerned [36,83].

Aside from a possible function of the Msh4–Msh5 complex in Holliday junction recognition and perhaps its stabilization, little is known about other recombination factors that promote branch migration of Holliday junctions. Although a mitochondrial Cruciform Cutting Endonuclease, CCE1, has been described [86], the resolvases that process Holliday junctions and other DNA intermediates in nuclear chromosomal recombination have not been identified.

2.2. Recombination by SSA

As the name implies, this mechanism involves the annealing or hybridization of two complementary DNA single strands to yield a recombinant. SSA has mostly been studied using plasmid or chromosomal constructs that carry direct repeats of a genetic element, but the work of Haber and Leung [33] has indicated that SSA can in fact occur across chromo-

somes. Genetically, SSA is less complex than classical recombination, being dependent on *RAD52* [66] and *RAD59* ([7]; Jim Haber, personal communication), but the other *RAD52* group members are apparently dispensable.

Consistent with the genetic data implicating *RAD52* in SSA, Rad52 anneals complementary DNA strands in vitro [61]. Interestingly, single strand annealing by Rad52 is stimulated by RPA [92,96], which is thought to remove secondary structure in the single strands and directs Rad52 to the bound single strands via specific protein–protein interactions [96]. As alluded to earlier, Rad59 possesses an ability to bind ssDNA and anneals complementary DNA strands. However, DNA annealing by Rad59 does not appear to depend on RPA [73]. In fact, relatively high concentrations of RPA inhibit the Rad59-mediated DNA strand annealing reaction. Rothstein et al. previously isolated a mutant of the *RFA1* gene which encodes the largest subunit of RPA and found that this mutation, *rfa1-D228Y*, allows SSA in a *rad52* mutant background. Interestingly, SSA in the *rfa-D228Y* mutant occurs much more frequently than in the isogenic wild type strain, which suggests that a normal level of RPA in fact suppresses SSA in vivo [93].

In addition to Rad52 and Rad59, genetic studies have implicated the DNA structure-specific endonuclease Rad1–Rad10 in trimming the non-homologous, unhybridized ssDNA overhangs during SSA (see Fig. 5). Interestingly, the mismatch repair factors Msh2 and Msh3 also appear to play a role in some SSA events, and it is possible that these factors serve to stabilize the annealed DNA structure and to target the Rad1–Rad10 endonucleolytic activity to the ssDNA overhangs [66]. It is not known whether the single-strand gaps after trimming of ssDNA overhangs are filled by a particular DNA polymerase. In addition to an involvement in SSA, Rad1 and Rad10 also seem to play a role in other mitotic recombination events [39,85]. Interestingly, the Rad1 homolog in *Drosophila*, Mei-9, is important for meiotic recombination as well [87].

2.3. Recombination by BIR

A pathway of very long tract gene conversion has been described, which entails the formation of a

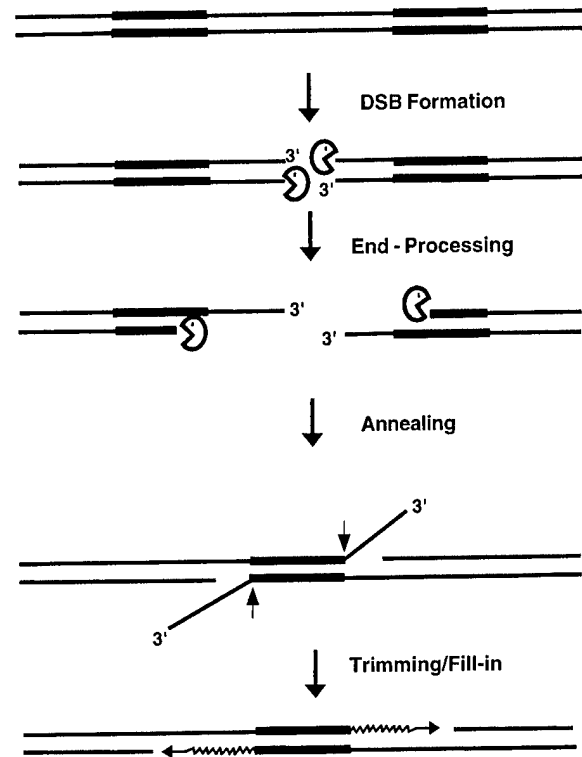


Fig. 5. Conceptual model for recombination by SSA. A DSB formed between direct repeats (represented by the dark lines) of a genetic element is processed exonucleolytically to yield 3' ssDNA tails. Because of the presence of DNA homology, the ssDNA tails can anneal to each other to form a joint. After strand annealing, nucleolytic trimming of the overhanging ssDNA tails and fill-in by a DNA polymerase yield a recombinant that has some of the original DNA sequence deleted.

short DNA joint between an initiating ssDNA substrate and a DNA molecule at a site where there is localized homology between the DNA molecules, followed by DNA synthesis to copy information contained within the DNA homolog. This pathway of recombination is dependent on *RAD52*, but not on *RAD51* [66]. It is possible that the DNA strand annealing activity of Rad52 is germane for establishing the initial DNA joint to prime DNA synthesis during BIR. Given the similarities between Rad52 and Rad59, it is tempting to speculate that perhaps BIR is also dependent on *RAD59* gene. The manner in which DNA joint formation and DNA synthesis are coupled in BIR and the relative contributions of the various DNA polymerases in the DNA synthesis reaction during BIR remain to be determined.

2.3.1. Some major unresolved problems

2.3.1.1. Meiotic DNA DSB formation. It remains a real mystery how the meiotic cell decides when to order the introduction of DNA DSBs at various “hotspots”. Is this process controlled by the synthesis of a critical protein factor at a certain stage of the meiotic program, or is it due to post-translational modifications of preexisting factors? Likewise, the mechanism by which Spo11, Rad50, Mre11, Xrs2, and other protein factors function to make the meiotic DNA DSBs is completely unknown at this point. Addressing these issues will require a combination of genetic, cell biological, and biochemical analyses.

2.3.2. Channeling of DSBs into recombination or non-recombination pathways

How is the decision made at the cellular level for channeling a DNA DSB into a certain recombination pathway or into non-homologous DNA end-joining? Is it possible that this decision is influenced by the cell cycle stage or is dependent on post-translational modifications of key protein components? Given that the trio of Rad50, Mre11, and Xrs2 are involved in both homologous recombination and non-homologous DNA end-joining, could they have a role in executing the cellular command to conduct either recombination or end-joining? These are interesting questions that again can be addressed genetically and biochemically.

2.3.3. Coupling of steps in recombination

It seems plausible that DNA end-processing, heteroduplex joint formation, and DNA synthesis are not distinct steps that occur independently, but rather that they are coupled to one another. This idea predicts a hierarchy of functional and physical interactions among factors traditionally thought of being required only in one or the other step of recombination. This idea can be tested, now that purified recombination factors are becoming available.

2.3.4. Chromatin structure

How does the recombination machinery deal with chromatin packing when conducting its business? The initiating ssDNA substrate that triggers recombination can be as long as 1 kb or more. Assuming that all of this ssDNA is utilized for heteroduplex

DNA formation, then an extensive region of chromatin probably needs to be remodeled to allow strand invasion, branch migration, and subsequent reactions to occur. How is chromatin remodeling mediated during recombination and repair? Do Rad54 and Rdh54/Tid1 play a role in chromatin remodeling?

2.3.5. Recombination in higher organisms

From the phenotypes of other eukaryotic cells mutated for recombination genes, from animal models, and from biochemical analyses of human recombination factors, it is apparent that the functions of the RAD52 group genes have been highly conserved. However, it is becoming clear that the genetic requirements for recombination are more complex and subject to additional layers of control in higher organisms. For instance, five Rad51-homologous proteins, Rad51B [5,79], Rad51C [23], Rad51D [76], XRCC2 [17,53], and XRCC3 [53] have already been identified in human cells. Evidence that at least some of these Rad51-homologous proteins have a role in recombination and repair has come from analysis of Chinese hamster ovary cell lines *irs1* and *irs1SF*, which are, respectively, defective in XRCC2 and XRCC3 [44,105,104]. These cell lines show a marked deficiency in the repair of DNA DSBs through recombination. Transient transfection of XRCC2 and XRCC3 restores recombinational repair to near wild-type levels [42,74]. XRCC3 interacts with Rad51 in the yeast two-hybrid system and co-immunoprecipitates with Rad51 from cell extract [53], while Rad51C interacts with both XRCC3 and Rad51B in two-hybrid studies [23]. XRCC3 has also been shown in the Bishop laboratory to be required for the formation of DNA damage-induced Rad51 nuclear foci [14]. Given what we know about yeast Rad55 and Rad57, which are also homologous to Rad51, it seems possible that Rad51B, Rad51C, Rad51D, XRCC2, and XRCC3 also form complexes with one another and function to enhance hRad51-ssDNA nucleoprotein filament assembly. It is not known whether these human Rad51-homologous proteins are all required simultaneously for efficient recombination or whether they play specific recombination roles in certain cell types or at certain cell cycle or developmental stages.

There is growing evidence that the recombination machinery is subjected to modulation by genes that have a tumor suppression function. In addition to *NBS1*, which encodes an integral component of the Mre11-associated nuclease complex as described at the beginning of this article, recent work has implicated the gene mutated in AT (*ATM*) and the breast tumor suppressor genes *BRCA1* [62] and *BRCA2* in modulating the efficiency of recombination. Specifically, *BRCA1* has recently been shown to associate with the hRad50–hMre11–Nbs1 complex and co-localizes with hRad50 in discrete nuclear foci upon irradiation [114]. In addition to its checkpoint function, *ATM* may be directly involved in DNA repair processes, as AT cells remain hypersensitive to ionizing radiation under conditions where the checkpoint function is dispensable [103]. AT patients and all *Atm*-deficient mice are infertile due to the absence of mature gametes (reviewed by Ref. [51]). Detailed analysis of *Atm*-deficient mice indicates that *ATM* is required for an early stage of meiosis [8].

Several lines of recent evidence have implicated the breast tumor suppressor *BRCA2* in DNA repair by recombination. Cultured cells become sensitive to γ -irradiation upon down-regulation of *BRCA2* [1], and the pancreatic adenocarcinoma Capan-1 cells, which lack one copy of the *BRCA2* gene and contain a truncating mutation (617delT) in the other *BRCA2* allele [31], are hypersensitive to various DNA damaging agents. In addition, fibroblasts derived from mutant mouse embryos deleted for *Brca2* are specifically sensitive to γ -irradiation [21,59,68]. Most importantly, several laboratories have reported the association of *BRCA2* with Rad51, and the interaction domain has been mapped to the BRC repeat in *BRCA2* [18,46,111]. These observations appear to point to a role for *BRCA2* in recombinational repair by influencing the activities of Rad51.

3. Epilogue

In every measurable way, *S. cerevisiae* has served as an excellent model for learning about the genetics and biochemistry of recombination processes, and there are good reasons to believe that studies in this organism will continue to yield answers to funda-

mental questions concerning recombination. The emergence of various tumor suppressors as potential modulators and regulators of recombination processes in mammals is an exciting recent development that has captivated investigators who otherwise work outside of the recombination field. Aficionados of recombination mechanisms can now legitimately declare that what they have loved to study is not only fascinating, but is also germane for human health.

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